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University of Southampton

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Music

**Music Criticism and the Making of a Civilised Mexico:
Modernity, Cosmopolitanism, and Wagnerism in the Second Half of the Nineteenth
Century**

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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University of Southampton

Abstract

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by

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This thesis explores narratives of civilisation and modernity in Mexican musical culture as articulated in the press during the second half of the nineteenth century. It focuses on two key historical moments to trace how ideas of progress circulated through transatlantic networks. The first part examines the Mexican Philharmonic Society and its journal *La armonía* (November 1866–May 1867), founded in the final year of Maximilian of Habsburg’s empire, which anticipated the concerns later voiced by composer-critic Gustavo Campa (1863–1934). The second part analyses Campa’s writings, particularly the construction of his identity as a reformer of Mexican music and the polemics he sustained between 1882 and 1889. Existing scholarship has often interpreted nineteenth-century Mexican musical identity through the liberal narratives of mid-nineteenth century and, after 1917, the lens of post-revolutionary nationalism. As a result, music criticism has been either misunderstood or overlooked, seen largely as the product of European aspirations—mostly French—among Mexico’s cultural elite. This thesis instead argues that Campa’s concern with musical progress was part of a broader attempt to respond to a crisis of national identity, one shared by intellectuals in other parts of the world.

Drawing on a wide range of sources—including daily newspapers, literary and musical journals in Mexico City, Paris, and Barcelona, as well as the private correspondence between Campa and the Spanish composer-critic Felipe Pedrell—this study shows how Campa’s criticism connected with international networks that promoted or rejected Wagnerism as a solution for ‘stagnant countries.’

The conclusions contribute to a reassessment of Mexico’s place in the cultural map of the nineteenth century. They challenge centre–periphery models that cast Mexican elites as passive recipients of European influence, highlight the role of music criticism in shaping a national cosmopolitan identity, and open new avenues for studying transnational intellectual networks and the imagined communities that shared cultural projects across borders.

Table of Contents

Contents

Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
Table of Tables	6
Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship	7
Acknowledgements	8
Introduction. Civilisation and Modernisation: Mexican Musical Identity (1866-1889)	9
Modernisation and Civilisation	10
French Imperialism	15
The Quarrel ‘Italianistas vs francesistas’ in Mexico’s Late Nineteenth Century: Questioning Post-Revolutionary Interpretations	18
Global History and the Critique of the Centre-periphery Model	20
Music Criticism and Musical Press	21
The Role of Musical Polemics	23
The Division between Critic and Literato	25
New Approaches to Music Criticism in Mexico	27
European Intellectual Authority and Transatlantic Networks	28
Chapter 1 Civilisation, Music, and Cosmopolitanism in <i>La Armonía</i> (1866–1867)	30
Presenting the Mexican Philharmonic Society (MPS) to Mexicans	32
Teaching History and Biography of Famous Men	40
Explaining the Relevance of Historical Thinking	42
Muñoz Ledo and the Writing of Biographies	44
The Relationship Between Music and Literature	51
Mozart, the <i>petit sortier</i> in <i>La armonía</i> and <i>Les Musées des familles</i> : the Artist Genius and its Role in Society.....	52

Table of Contents

Stradella by Montellanos: The Power of the Vocal Music in Society.....	57
Kepler and Antonia by Muñoz Ledo: the German Element.....	60
Vocal Over Instrumental Music	64
The Choral Movement.....	65
Creating an Orchestra to Fulfil the MPS Mission.....	70
Chapter 2 Creating the Mexican Wagner and the <i>Davidsbündler</i> (1882–1887)	72
Campa, ‘the Mexican Wagner’: Romantic Self-Fashioning and the Search for Cultural Prestige	74
Unpacking the Layers of the ‘Mexican Wagner’	79
The Progressive Mexican <i>Davidsbündler</i> (1885–1886)	91
The Monday Soirée Group (1885)	91
Performing High-Art Repertoire for Social Elevation (1885–1886)	95
The Turn to Militancy and the Instituto Musical (1886–1887)	103
The Promises and Contradictions of Civilisation and Progress.....	113
Chapter 3 Articulating Mexican Progress Abroad: Campa, Pedrell and the Politics of Musical Authority (1888–1889)	117
Forging a Transatlantic Bond: <i>El polífono</i> and the <i>Ilustración musical hispano- americana</i>.....	118
Finding an Artistic Ally	124
Morales Writes to Pedrell	130
Olano’s Open Letter to Pedrell	136
Chapter 4 Latin Modernists, and Wagnerian Discourses: Intellectual Networks in the Mexican Musical Press (1888–1889)	141
Mexican Readings of Progress and Decadence in the Italian School.....	143
The ‘Midday Wagnerians’: Marsillach and Boito as Latin Defenders of Wagnerism. 152	
French Wagnerism Reframed in Mexican Debates.....	158

Table of Contents

Campa's Construction of a Wagnerian Saint-Saëns.....	162
Morales's Rebuttal through the Anti-Wagnerian Saint-Saëns.....	165
Conclusions.....	172
Appendix A Concert Programmes (1884–1886).....	180
A.1 Charity Concert at the Tivoli de San Cosme.....	180
A.2 Teodoro Curant's Vocal and Instrumental Benefit Concert	182
A.3 Annovazzi's Vocal and Instrumental Benefit Concert.....	183
A.4 Poor people's Vocal and Instrumental Benefit Concert.....	184
A.5 Rosa Palacios's Vocal and Instrumental Farewell Concert	186
A.6 Ricardo Castro's Vocal and Instrumental Farewell Concert.....	187
A.7 Teodoro Curant's Vocal and Instrumental Farewell Concert.....	189
A.8 Instituto Musical Campa-Hernández Acevedo's Concert.....	191
Bibliography.....	193
Primary Sources	193
Secondary Sources.....	195

Table of Tables

Table 1. Chronological List of Concerts, August 1885–February 1886.....	96
Table 2: Compositions by Campa, Castro and Villanueva performed in 1885.....	100
Table 3: Pieces by Wagner Performed at the 1885–1886 Concerts.....	101

Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

I, Fernanda Munoz Salazar, declare that this thesis 'Music Criticism and the Making of a Civilised Mexico: Modernity, Cosmopolitanism, and Wagner in the Second half of the Nineteenth Century' and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signature: Fernanda Munoz Salazar Date: 30 March 2026

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Introduction. Civilisation and Modernisation: Mexican Musical Identity (1866-1889)

At the end of 1882, a group of young Mexican musicians would meet in a room they named *France* in the centre of Mexico City. Recently graduated from the Conservatoire, Gustavo Campa, Ricardo Castro, Juan Hernández Acevedo and Pablo Castellanos León joined their friends Felipe Villanueva, Carlos Meneses and Ignacio Quezadas to immerse themselves in French culture. They read the works of contemporary French poets—longing to set their verses to music in accordance with their prosody—and performed in private the works of Romantic composers still unknown at the Conservatoire. Their knowledge of these European triumphs came through Parisian newspapers and journals, regularly received via the *Société Philharmonique Française au Mexique*. This evocative episode, reconstructed by Jesús C. Romero in 1949, was intended to portray the French aspirations of Mexican elites at the end of the century, though his account was shaped by the post-revolutionary suspicion of high art as a component of national musical identity.¹

Historians have noted that this mistrust was not limited to that period: as Erika Pani has observed, traditional historiography long depicted Maximilian's empire (1862–67) as merely 'an accident that came from the outside.'² In the last two decades, scholarship on nineteenth-century Mexican musical culture has begun to adopt a broader perspective, reframing the imitation of French models as cosmopolitan aspirations towards civilisation and modernisation.³ In 2006, musicologist Miriam Vázquez Montano questioned the artificiality of terms such as *francesismo*, pointing out that Mexican musicians were equally interested in

¹ Jesús C. Romero, 'El francesismo en la evolución musical de México,' *Carnet Musical*, supplement, 1, no. 4, (July 1949): 157. Romero included this story in a chapter of his *Historia de la música en México*, later reproduced as an independent article, to illustrate his six stages in the evolution of music in Mexico, beginning with the period of Spanish rule (1521–1821). It should be noted that the dates provided by Romero—and later echoed by scholars such as Consuelo Carredano—are inaccurate. Romero placed the gathering in 1882, while Carredano suggested 1885. However, as the sources reveal, the group itself never actually existed, as will be further explained. See: Consuelo Carredano, *Felipe Villanueva 1862–1893* (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cenidim, 1992), 59.

² 'el Imperio fue un accidente que nos vino de fuera,' Erika Pani, *El Segundo Imperio: pasados de usos múltiples* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas / Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004), 110.

³ In this thesis, the concept of *civilisation* is employed for its significance to nineteenth-century Mexicans as a means of constructing a nation-state identity. It also carries other meanings, for instance when referring to pre-Columbian cultures such as the Aztec. The Mexican identity proposed by nineteenth-century cultural elites should be understood as a specific vision of nation-state building which, according to Yásnaya Elena Aguilar Gil, excluded other long-standing cultures. Some Indigenous groups today do not consider themselves Mexican and do not recognise the federal government. For Gil's argument on the notion of civilisation as an excluding concept, see Yásnaya Elena Aguilar Gil, *¿Nunca Más Un México Sin Nosotros?* (CIDEI-Unitierra, Chiapas, 2018).

German models. Her research demonstrated that late-nineteenth-century composers such as Castro and Villanueva experimented with a modern technical language.⁴ While this conclusion seems self-evident today, it was groundbreaking at the time, as it underscored how little was known about nineteenth-century musicians and their context—particularly in relation to music criticism.

This thesis examines narratives of civilisation and modernisation in Mexican musical high art culture as reflected in the press during the second half of the nineteenth century. Music criticism in Mexico reveals intense debates over the complex question of national identity. Dominant narratives portrayed Mexico as a backward nation, arguing that Mexicans had failed in their mission to civilise and modernise the country since independence in 1821. These narratives can be traced and reconstructed in the musical press through the theoretical lenses of cultural transfer, global history, and critical perspectives on colonial legacies.⁵

The thesis is organised around two case studies. The first examines the Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana (Mexican Philharmonic Society, MPS) and its musical journal *La armonía*, published between November 1866 and May 1867, during the final year of Maximilian of Habsburg's empire. The second focuses on the music criticism of composer-critic Gustavo Campa (1863–1934), whose career illustrates how, from 1883 onwards, he promoted the adoption of Franco-German models of musical modernity as a means for Mexico to become a progressive nation. Between 1888 and 1889, Campa engaged in polemics in Mexico City that attracted international attention. Taken together, these case studies reveal how Mexican music criticism operated within a transnational network, constantly engaging with European debates—above all those of the French press—and reinterpreting them within the local context.

Modernisation and Civilisation

The absence of musical modernisation was a recurring concern in the press of Mexico City, especially during the opera seasons that introduced new works. Critics employed terms such as *modernismo*, *modernización*, and *moderno/moderna* in ways that differ from their current meanings. These words circulated in everyday discourse and soon became commonplace. The

⁴ Miriam Vázquez Montano, *El modernismo en la obra para piano de Castro, Elorduy y Villanueva* (Master's Thesis, Universidad Veracruzana, 2006), 28.

⁵ I avoid the term 'postcolonial studies' because, while it is widely used in Anglophone scholarship, it often obscures the distinct Latin American intellectual traditions that have long reflected on colonial legacies and their continuities. See Aníbal Quijano, 'Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina,' in *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas*, ed. Edgardo Lander (Caracas: CLACSO, 2000), 201–246; Walter D. Mignolo, 'Border Thinking and Decolonial Cosmopolitanism: Overcoming Colonial/Imperial Differences,' in *Routledge International Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies*, ed. Gerard Delanty, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2019), 101–116.

adjective ‘modern,’ for example, was typically used in three senses: to describe something new or contemporary; to indicate what was fashionable; and, more broadly, to denote a historical period beginning with the Viennese classics and extending into the late nineteenth century. In some cases, however, critics projected the origins of modernity further back in time, even to the Renaissance.

Scholars have long debated the concepts of modernism and modernity. In *Bach’s Cycle, Mozart’s Arrow*, Karol Berger argued that musicologists tend to associate modernism with a twentieth-century movement, while modernity—as a broader cultural category dating back to the late eighteenth century—has attracted less attention within music history, except among those influenced by Adorno.⁶ Berger’s observations resonate with the way Mexican music has often been studied: modernism remains linked to avant-garde composers such as Carlos Chávez (1899–1978). Recent scholarship, including contributions to *Carlos Chávez and His World*, has shown how Chávez presented himself in New York not as an exotic Mexican but as a cosmopolitan modernist, fully integrated into transnational networks of musical exchange.⁷ If the cosmopolitanism and transnationalism of the modernist Chávez are now widely acknowledged, then the question arises: why have the modernist and cosmopolitan aspirations of nineteenth-century intellectuals such as Campa been consistently overlooked?

The notion of progress has been central to both modernism and modernity. Stephanie N. Stallings has shown how Carlos Chávez and Henry Cowell framed their idea of American modernism in explicitly evolutionary terms. For both composers, it was crucial to situate their music within a historical lineage: they presented themselves as heirs to centuries of tradition while insisting on their role in shaping the music of the future. Chávez’s writings, particularly *Toward a New Music*, drew on the social evolutionism of thinkers such as Spencer, Comte, Marx, and Engels to argue that artistic creation, like scientific innovation, embodied a logic of progress. In this way, he sought to legitimise modern music by stressing its historical continuity and its scientific foundations. Stallings highlights how these concerns, rooted in nineteenth-century philosophy, reveal the centrality of progress to Chávez’s conception of modernism.⁸

In discussing progress and modernity, John Williamson has shown how the German press of the later nineteenth century treated modernity, progress, and the avant-garde as interrelated concepts. His essay distinguishes different types of modern intellectuals

⁶ Karol Berger, *Bach’s Cycle, Mozart’s Arrow: An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 5.

⁷ Christina Taylor Gibson, ‘Chávez, Modern Music, and the New York Scene,’ in *Carlos Chávez and His World*, ed. Leonora Saavedra (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 23–24.

⁸ Stephanie N. Stallings, ‘The Pan/American Modernism of Carlos Chávez and Henry Cowell,’ in *Carlos Chávez and His World*, ed. Leonora Saavedra (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 35–36.

concerned with musical evolution, and argues that the avant-garde—exemplified by figures such as Franz Liszt—was the most radical expression of progress. This concern with progress was as central to Mexican critics as it was to their German counterparts. More broadly, progress was an Enlightenment ideal, associated with what Brett Bowden has described as the ‘end of history’ thesis: the notion of a universal, linear march toward a modernity defined by liberal democracy, market capitalism, and cosmopolitanism.⁹ This principle is fundamental when analysing the Mexican Philharmonic Society and Campa’s writings, for progress was the driving force of their critical agenda.

Another aspect to consider is the literary movement known as *Modernismo Hispanoamericano*, which emerged in the late nineteenth century as an explicitly cosmopolitan aesthetic. Writers such as Rubén Darío, Amado Nervo, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, Salvador Díaz Mirón, José Martí, José Enrique Rondó, José Asunción Silva, and Juan Ramón Jiménez enriched their Spanish heritage through the reading of French Symbolist and Parnassian poets, the classics, and other European traditions. As Rubén Darío later recalled, ‘we had to become polyglots and cosmopolitans, and a ray of light began to reach us from all the peoples of the world.’¹⁰ This international movement expressed the intellectual and artistic concerns of authors writing from so-called peripheral nations, for whom cosmopolitanism was both a cultural aspiration and a strategy of self-legitimation. While a detailed comparison with Campa falls beyond the scope of this study, the existence of *Modernismo* highlights the wider cultural climate in which late-nineteenth-century Mexicans articulated their own modernist and cosmopolitan ambitions.

In the music realm, the staging of opera offered a parallel arena in which ideas of civilisation, modernity, and international belonging were publicly debated. Within this context, Richard Wagner came to occupy a central place as a recurrent reference and a powerful symbol of musical modernity in Mexico. To date, however, most historiography on Wagner in Mexico has tended to locate his introduction to Mexican musical culture in the premieres of Wagnerian stage works in 1891.¹¹ Scholarly accounts have generally focused on the visit of Charles Locke’s

⁹ John Williamson, ‘Progress, Modernity and the Concept of an Avant-Garde,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 287–317; Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3, 6.

¹⁰ ‘tuvimos que ser políglotas y cosmopolitas y nos comenzó a venir un rayo de luz de todos los pueblos del mundo.’ Quoted in Miriam Vázquez Montano, *El modernismo en la obra para piano de Castro, Elorduy y Villanueva* (Master’s thesis, Universidad Veracruzana, 2006), 23.

¹¹ Gloria Carmona, *La música de México, Historia. Periodo de la Independencia a la Revolución (1810 a 1910)* (Mexico: UNAM, 1984), 147–150. Ricardo Miranda, ‘“Sí, sé que hay sordos...”: el extraño caso del Capitán Voyer y el gusto musical en el otro fin de siglo,’ *Ecos, alientos y sonidos. Ensayos de música mexicana* (Mexico, Universidad Veracruzana, 2001), 137–154. Armando Gómez Rivas, *Crítica musical en México, 1892* (Doctoral dissertation, Universidad Nacional de México, 2019), 93, 97–99.

English Grand Opera Company—known locally as Emma Juch’s Opera Company—which performed at the National Theatre between March and April of that year. The company introduced German operatic repertoire hitherto unknown on the local stage, including *Tannhäuser*, *The Flying Dutchman*, and *Die Walküre*, alongside earlier German works such as Beethoven’s *Fidelio* and Weber’s *Der Freischütz*. As Ricardo Miranda and Armando Gómez Rivas have shown, these productions were widely perceived as challenging and unfamiliar, particularly by an audience accustomed to Italian *bel canto*, and were often characterised in the press as ‘heavy, long, and incomprehensible’—a reception that contributed to the company’s financial failure. Nevertheless, both scholars have interpreted these premieres—*Die Walküre* in particular—as a decisive moment in the modernisation of Mexican musical culture. Gómez Rivas has emphasised two recurrent critical concerns: the opposition between Italian and German operatic styles, and the insufficient technical level of the National Theatre’s orchestra, which was deemed inadequate for the performance of modern works. Within this framework, Wagner’s music came to function as a yardstick by which Mexican critics measured artistic progress, institutional competence, and, ultimately, cultural modernity.

In 2019, my chapter on the reception of *Lohengrin*’s premiere by Napoleón Sieni’s Italian company in November 1890 demonstrated that the visit of the English Grand Opera Company should be understood as part of a longer and continuous process rather than as an isolated moment of rupture.¹² That earlier study proposed reading the English company’s appearance in relation to the staging of *Lohengrin*—the most frequently performed Wagnerian opera of the nineteenth century. It showed how Wagner’s name, long before his music entered the Mexican repertoire, circulated widely in the local press from the 1860s onwards, where he was initially dismissed as a noisy and unbalanced figure, echoing hostile European portrayals. Over time, however, this image was gradually reshaped through the romanticised figures of the hero, the priest, and the social reformer that came to dominate Wagner’s posthumous reception after 1883, both in Europe and in Mexico. Moreover, the staging of *Lohengrin* was celebrated in the Mexican press as a symbolic triumph aligned with cosmopolitan aspirations; notably, commentators emphasised that the opera was performed in Mexico City before Paris. Such comparisons were not merely rhetorical, but formed part of a broader cultural logic in which Mexican elites measured their own level of civilisation and modernity against European—particularly French—models.

¹² Fernanda Muñoz Salazar, ‘¿Progreso y civilización? Destellos románticos en torno al estreno de *Lohengrin* de Richard Wagner en la prensa mexicana en 1890’ in *Más allá del amor, la nostalgia, la pasión y el éxtasis... El romanticismo en México, siglo XIX*, ed. Laura Suárez de la Torre (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología, 2020), 242–266.

The Mexican press reveals that the concept of civilisation was often linked to modernisation and modernity, particularly in relation to the arts and sciences. Cultural historians have underscored the importance of this project for the creation and consolidation of independent Mexico. A key contribution was the volume *Los papeles para Euterpe* (2014), which drew attention to the neglected world of music publishers and situated for the first time music at the heart of the nation-building project. Equally important is the research of Áurea Maya, who analysed how opera functioned ‘as an instrument for civilisation’ between 1824 and 1867. According to Maya, cultural elites eagerly staged the latest operas to demonstrate their good taste and, by extension, their level of civilisation. Maya argued that opera consolidated the identity and culture of the Mexican bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century:

It is important to stress that opera (more than salon music, understood as piano pieces and songs) gradually came to embody a cultural project which, although rooted in Europe, provided identity to a nation in the making while also conferring universality and cosmopolitanism, regardless of the political faction in power.¹³

However, the notion of a ‘cultural project’ raises questions, since the concepts of culture and civilisation are often used interchangeably. Brett Bowden has traced the shifting fortunes of these terms, noting that ‘civilisation’ has carried so many meanings that it often lacks analytical clarity, and that while it was once displaced by ‘culture,’ ‘civilisation is now back’.¹⁴ Bowden also draws on Jean Starobinski to warn of the dangers of deifying civilisation, which could acquire a sacred aura through associations with refinement, technical progress, and social order, and in so doing supplant religious values—what Starobinski called its ‘sacred authority’.¹⁵

The intellectual history of civilisation is inseparable from the Christian ‘civilising missions’.¹⁶ This perspective is particularly relevant to Mexico, where postcolonial historiography has often created an artificial break between the Spanish colonial period and the nineteenth century. In practice, however, the civilising mission continued after Independence in 1821, now in secular form. Liberal governments worked to separate Church and State, while schools promoted a secular education. Yet the underlying attitude persisted: intellectuals and

¹³ ‘destacar como la ópera (por sobre la música de salón entendida como música para piano y canciones) fue concibiendo, no de forma explícita, un proyecto cultural que si bien tuvo sus raíces en Europa, dio identidad a una nación en formación y a la vez le otorgó universalidad y cosmopolitismo, no importando la filiación política en el poder.’ Áurea Maya, ‘La ópera en el siglo XIX en México,’ in *Los papeles para Euterpe: la música en la Ciudad de México desde la historia cultural. Siglo XIX*, ed. Laura Suárez de la Torre (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, CONACYT, 2014), 487.

¹⁴ Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 13.

¹⁵ Jean Starobinsky quoted in *ibid.*, 45–46.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

artists saw themselves as carrying forward the task of ‘civilising the barbarians’—a discourse also echoed in the writings of music critics.

The image of an ‘uncivilised’ Mexico had circulated in Europe since the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492. In cultural terms, the trope of the ‘noble savage’¹⁷ coexisted with this image and appears in a wide range of works: from the essays of Michel de Montaigne to operas such as Vivaldi’s *Motezuma* and Carlos Gomes’s *Il Guarany*. Yet nineteenth-century Mexican scholars have tended to overlook the implications of cultural imperialism for the history of music.

This broader discourse of cultural imperialism provides the backdrop for understanding French ambitions in Mexico. The prestige of French civilisation was not only political and military, but also cultural, and by the late nineteenth century it became a central reference for Mexican intellectuals and musicians.

French Imperialism

The group of young men introduced at the beginning of this chapter embodied the admiration for France that intensified in the 1880s. Throughout the nineteenth century, musical discourse in the press portrayed French culture as an advanced civilisation that Mexico should emulate. Many intellectuals believed that since Independence in 1821 the country had suffered instability and failed to achieve the prosperity it desired. The pessimism expressed by the Mexican Philharmonic Society and by Campa in his writings paralleled the views of other Latin American and Spanish intellectuals who admired the achievements of French culture. Post-revolutionary historiography has often attributed this admiration exclusively to the Porfirian period, yet the sources reveal that France was already highly esteemed in nineteenth-century Mexico. The two nations shared an extensive history dating back centuries, but France’s political and military presence was especially marked in the mid-nineteenth century. While the political history of the French intervention (1851–1867) has been thoroughly studied, its impact on musical life remains largely unexplored. This raises the question of whether Mexicans rejected French culture during and after the invasion, and invites further reflection on why Campa’s generation came to embrace it so enthusiastically.

Campa’s attitude should be situated within a broader context. Born in 1863, the year that coincided with the foundation of the Mexican Habsburg empire (1862–1867), he grew up in a period marked by French imperialism. Napoleon III and Mexican conservatives offered the

¹⁷ On the genealogy of the ‘noble savage,’ see: Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley: University California Press, 2001).

crown to the Austrian Archduke Maximilian of Habsburg (1832–1867), an episode that consolidated Napoleon’s imperialist project known as *l’Expédition du Mexique*. As Edward Shawcross has noted, ‘Latin America was an important focus of French foreign policy in the period 1820–67,’ and the Mexican intervention can be compared in scale to contemporary French policy in Indochina.¹⁸ Yet French ambitions in Latin America had earlier origins: already in the eighteenth century France sought to expand its commercial influence in Spanish colonial territories, and after 1700 it intensified its efforts to control aspects of the Hispanic economy. These ambitions created tensions throughout the nineteenth century, including interventions in Spain and across Latin America. By 1815 France had reached its smallest territorial extent since the early seventeenth century, and it was also one of the last countries to recognise Mexico’s independence in 1821. Diplomatic relations were established under Louis Philippe but were severed after Maximilian’s execution in 1867, resuming only in 1880. In the meantime, the French government had pursued scientific explorations of Mexico’s landscape with a view to exploiting its resources and establishing a military presence that could counterbalance the expansionism of the United States.¹⁹

To justify their presence in territories formerly colonised by Spain and Portugal, the French government promoted the idea that the southern nations of the Americas formed part of the *Latin race*, and that these new republics required guidance and support. France thus presented South America, Central America, and Mexico as heirs of the Latin race in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon world.²⁰ Michel Chevalier played a central role in shaping this discourse. A prominent Saint-Simonian, frequent contributor to the *Revue des deux mondes*, and specialist in Mexican affairs, Chevalier popularised the concept of Latin America and laid the ideological foundations for Napoleon III’s military intervention in Mexico. He argued that the former Iberian metropolises required political renewal, and proposed that a scientific commission should explore and study Mexico’s landscape as preparation for France’s wider ambitions. For Chevalier, military intervention was only the first step towards establishing full French dominance over Mexico.²¹

¹⁸ Edward Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America, 1820–1867. Equilibrium in the New World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 12–13. Shawcross presents a list of countries in which France intervened, see page 12.

¹⁹ Jean Meyer, ‘Dos siglos, dos naciones: México y Francia, 1810–2010,’ *Historias*, 72, no. 83 (2012): 3, 9.

²⁰ France excluded the colonies of Canada, Mississippi and Louisiana from Latin America. Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire*, 129.

²¹ Esther Aillón Soria, ‘La política cultural de Francia en la génesis y difusión del concepto *L’Amérique Latine*, 1860-1930,’ in *Construcción de las identidades latinoamericanas: ensayos de historia intelectual, siglos XIX y XX*, ed. Aimer Granados García and Carlos Marichal (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2004), n. p. Philippe Régnier, ‘Le point de vue sur le Mexique de l’intellectuel saint-simonien Michel Chevalier, professeur d’économie politique et collaborateur de la Revue des Deux Mondes (1806–1879),’ in *Impressions du Mexique et de France / Impresiones de México y de Francia*, eds. Lise Andries and Laura

The origins and uses of the term *Latin America* have been widely discussed. Hispanic American intellectuals first employed the expression at a conference in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century, with its authorship variously attributed to Francisco Bilbao (Chile), José María Torres Caicedo (Colombia), or Carlos Calvo (Argentina). According to historian Esther Aillón Soria, the creation of the concept *L'Amérique latine* formed part of a cultural policy that began around 1860 and dominated until 1930. Hispanic American and French intellectuals jointly advanced the notion of a specifically Latin American identity, one that combined political independence with European cultural roots: 'Latin America's specificity lay in the fact that it had achieved political independence, claimed its place as American, and, in part, as Latin of European origin.'²² Latins were also understood as belonging to the Catholic world. Yet, as Aillón Soria emphasises, this was an unequal fellowship. For Latin American intellectuals, the aim was to construct a collective identity that included them in the European 'we,' whereas for French intellectuals the goal was to consolidate the global South against the growing power of the North, particularly the United States and England.²³ Aillón Soria's work offers a valuable perspective in which Latin American intellectuals are not passive recipients but active participants in shaping an identity later marginalised in the twentieth century. The idea of a global identity rooted in the Latin tradition is crucial to the present study.

Another issue concerns the essentialist approaches that have dominated the study of nineteenth-century figures, which tend to obscure the role of Mexicans themselves in spreading and perpetuating cultural imperialism. Such behaviour can be understood as a form of informal imperialism, a theoretical framework that 'posits that a state can employ a variety of means in order to influence another sovereign government.'²⁴ As Erika Pani has observed, acknowledging the support of Mexican statesmen for Maximilian's empire would have been considered heretical only a few decades ago.²⁵ As noted above, nineteenth-century Mexican historiography has largely avoided confronting the implications of cultural imperialism, and in doing so it has also overlooked the agency of local actors involved in its informal practices. One of the central questions of this thesis is therefore to examine the implications of Campa's and the Philharmonic Society's own civilising mission. These broader questions about cultural and political imperialism provide the necessary background for understanding the aesthetic quarrels that divided Mexican critics and composers in the late nineteenth century.

Suárez de la Torre (Paris and Mexico City: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2009), 325–342.

²² 'la especificidad latinoamericana era que había logrado su independencia política, se reclamaba americana y, una parte de ella, latina de raíz europea.' Aillón Soria, 'La política cultural de Francia,' n.p.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ For a discussion on informal imperialism in Latin America, see: Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire*, 16–18.

²⁵ Pani, *El segundo imperio*, 16.

The Quarrel 'Italianistas vs francesistas' in Mexico's Late Nineteenth Century: Questioning Post-Revolutionary Interpretations

The study of Mexican musical identity in the late nineteenth century has often been shaped by notions of originality and authenticity derived from post-revolutionary nationalism after 1917, notions that continue to influence how this period is interpreted today. The story of the young musicians who gathered in the *Cuarto Francia*, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, serves as a narrative thread linking the opening vignette with the broader discussion of musical identity. According to Romero, the original group of seven lost a member when Castellanos returned to his native Yucatán. The remaining six, later known as the *Group of Six*, embraced the mission of championing French music. Under Gustavo Campa's leadership, they opposed the dominance of Italian opera, which had prevailed in Mexico since the mid-nineteenth century. To spread their 'ideology,' Campa published music criticism in the press, while the group opened a music school named the Instituto Musical Campa-Hernández Acevedo, directly challenging composer-critic Melesio Morales (1838–1908), a leading *Italianista* and Campa's former teacher at the Conservatoire. In the summer of 1888, Campa published his essay 'La música en México,' which Romero interpreted as establishing the dominance of French music in late-nineteenth-century Mexico.²⁶ However, the sources suggest a more nuanced picture. Some of these musicians never collaborated, and the evidence reveals a more complex cultural dynamic in which French music was only one element of Mexico City's vibrant musical life.

The episode of the *Group of Six* who opposed routine and championed French music is commonly remembered as the 'quarrel between Italianistas and Francesistas'. In 1949, Jesús C. Romero (1893–1958) published his influential article '*El francesismo en la evolución musical de México*,' mentioned at the beginning of this introduction. For Romero, the debate pitted two figures against each other: Morales, defender of the Italian school, and Campa, champion of the French school. Since its publication, the article has been widely accepted by scholars and has shaped the way the history of 1880s Mexican music has been understood. Yet Romero's interpretation introduced four major problems that have become cornerstones in the historiography of nineteenth-century Mexican music criticism.

First, he divided the century into four successive stages—Spanish, Italian, French, and German—an evolutionary model reminiscent of art-historical style studies. This narrative suggested a 'natural order' in which one national school displaced another, leaving no room for different repertoires to coexist. Second, Romero essentialised individuals: musicians such as

²⁶ Romero, 'El francesismo en la evolución musical de México,' 158.

Campa appeared as passive figures whose affiliations were determined by the forces of history rather than personal agency. Third, he attributed moral characteristics to the protagonists in order to dramatise the conflict: Morales appeared as the obstinate old master clinging to his privilege, while Campa was cast as the passionate young visionary of a brighter future. While there may be some truth to these portrayals, they obscure the complexity of both men, their networks, and their intellectual backgrounds. Finally, Romero placed the Conservatorio Nacional (National Conservatoire) at the centre of his narrative, overshadowing the wider cultural life of nineteenth-century Mexico City and leaving questions of social and intellectual mobility largely unexplored.

This framework has profoundly shaped the historiography of nineteenth-century Mexican music, yet its limitations point to the need for a reassessment that takes into account the plurality of repertoires, the agency of individuals, and the broader social and intellectual networks in which they operated.

The case of Campa illustrates the position of an uncomfortable figure in late nineteenth-century Mexico, a composer and critic who aspired to be part of the ‘civilised world.’ Today he is remembered above all as a polemicist, a champion of French music, and in his later career, as director of the National Conservatoire between 1907 and 1914. Yet little is known about his life, music, writings, or networks, despite his prominent role in Mexican society over more than forty years. This neglect reflects the way twentieth-century musicologists portrayed Campa: as a conservative composer of the Porfiriato, bound to old-fashioned values.²⁷

The French aspirations of Porfirio Díaz’s regime later clashed with the post-revolutionary identity constructed after 1917, which grounded Mexican nationhood in local culture. Post-revolutionary discourse exalted the indigenous past and the pre-Hispanic world, while caricaturing the nineteenth century as a period of imitation and decadence. In this framework, colonial New Spain and nineteenth-century Mexico were likened to the Middle Ages, while the twentieth century was celebrated as a Renaissance, following a familiar European model of periodisation. As a result, nineteenth-century Mexicans with cosmopolitan aspirations were accused of imitating European models rather than producing original art rooted in local traditions. Figures such as Campa were thus cast as outsiders, and in some cases their very belonging to Mexican identity was denied.

²⁷ In traditional historiography, the Porfiriato refers to the era ruled by Porfirio Díaz (1830–1915), who governed Mexico from 1876 to 1910, contemporaneous with the European *Belle Époque*. In his final decades, Díaz was unwilling to relinquish power, convinced that no one else was prepared to govern the country.

The Porfirian elite's admiration for French culture also became a commonplace in the historiography of Mexican music. In a historical panorama of twentieth-century Mexican high art music, musicologist Aurelio Tello described Campa, who retired in 1925, as a 'old glory of the Porfiriato in retirement'—a label that reduced him to the embodiment of an obsolete lifestyle.²⁸ Yet publications from 1883 to 1889 offer a more accurate picture of cultural practices. This dissertation revises and re-evaluates such reductionist, even caricatured, nationalist narratives through new scholarly approaches drawn from music criticism, cultural transfer, global history, and postcolonial studies. As I will show, the study of the nineteenth-century press challenges the post-revolutionary frameworks inherited by musicology and opens three areas of reflection: first, it situates Campa within the broader cultural and political life of his time; second, it connects Mexico to global intellectual and artistic networks; and third, it demonstrates that the idea of modernisation—so often associated with the music of Carlos Chávez—had its roots in the previous century.

Situating Campa within this broader historiographical framework makes it possible to reconsider the quarrel between Italianistas and Francesistas not as a simple clash of schools, but as part of a larger debate over civilisation, identity, and modernity in nineteenth-century Mexico.

Global History and the Critique of the Centre-periphery Model

The study of nineteenth-century Mexican music has often been framed through the central-periphery model, which depicts European nations as civilised centres and the Americas as dependent peripheries. For this dissertation, I draw on global history in order to move beyond the nationalistic approaches that still dominate much of Mexican scholarship. As Sebastian Conrad has argued, we need 'less narrowly national perspectives on the past [...] and dissatisfaction with the long-standing and pervasive tendency to conceive national histories as the history of discrete, self-contained spaces.'²⁹ Similarly, Diego Olstein has observed that while historians learned to think within national boundaries, global interconnections force us to question these limits. He identifies twelve branches of history that cross national borders and proposes four strategies for global thinking: comparing, connecting, conceptualising, and contextualising.³⁰

²⁸ 'vieja gloria del Porfiriato en retiro' Aurelio Tello, 'La creación musical en México durante el siglo XX' in *La Música en México: Panorama del siglo XX*, ed. Aurelio Tello (Mexico City: CONACULTA, 2010), 490.

²⁹ Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 2.

³⁰ Diego Olstein, *Thinking History Globally* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1–8.

Such approaches are particularly relevant for nineteenth-century Mexico. Far from being an isolated periphery, Mexico was part of expanding transatlantic networks. Marcia Arbeu and Ana Claudia da Silva have shown that although globalisation dates back to the sixteenth century, it was in the nineteenth century that culture experienced a profound revolution thanks to new technologies. Printing, transport, and communication fostered a transatlantic marketplace where books and periodicals circulated widely. This perspective challenges the conventional North–South model and highlights instead ‘a network of knowledge exchange that is constantly expanding and leads to the renewal of technology, transport and communication, then and now’.³¹ Within Mexico City itself, as Laura Suárez de la Torre has demonstrated, there existed extensive networks of booksellers that supplied intellectuals and musicians.³² Figures such as Luis Felipe Muñoz Ledo of the Mexican Philharmonic Society, and subsequently Campa and Morales, were able to build private libraries with European music literature, which they cited in their writings. These references allow us to reconstruct the narratives and polemics around the role of music in Mexico’s civilisation and progress, and to analyse the central themes explored in this thesis.

Finally, this global framework requires rethinking Paris itself. Traditionally, countries and aesthetic schools have been treated as rigid categories: Latin American elites were said to be simply ‘Frenchified,’ or Mexican audiences were defined by their taste for Italian opera. Such views reduce Parisian multiculturalism to a single cultural identity. In this dissertation, however, Paris is considered as a node that synthesised diverse knowledges and redistributed them internationally, shaping both European and American debates.

Music Criticism and Musical Press

The historiography of nineteenth-century Mexican music criticism has often overlooked its complexity, partly because it inherited from the late nineteenth century a notion of specialisation that has rarely been questioned. As will be examined in the following chapters, Campa declared in 1886 that music criticism did not exist in Mexico. By this he meant

³¹ Márcia Arbeu and Ana Cláudia da Silva, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Cultural Revolution of the Nineteenth Century: Theatre, the Book-Trade and Reading in the Transatlantic World*, ed. Márcia Arbeu and Ana Cláudia da Silva (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 5.

³² Laura Suárez de la Torre, ‘Tejer redes, hacer negocios: la Librería Internacional Rosa (1818–1850), su presencia comercial e injerencia cultural en México,’ in *Impressions du Mexique et de France / Impresiones de México y de Francia*, eds. Lise Andries and Laura Suárez de la Torre (Paris and Mexico City: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2009), 87–114; Laura Suárez de la Torre, ‘Los libretos: un negocio para las imprentas. 1830–1860,’ in *Los papeles para Euterpe: la música en la Ciudad de México desde la historia cultural. Siglo XIX*, ed. Laura Suárez de la Torre (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, CONACYT, 2014), chapter 3, Kindle.

specialised articles written by professional musicians and published in music journals. In contrast, he rejected the tradition of reviews written by *litteratos* in the daily press, whom he dismissed as dilettanti lacking musical training.

This notion of specialisation led scholars to privilege the few musical journals that existed as the only ‘serious’ sources for the study of music criticism. These publications were short-lived: the *Gaceta Musical* (1898–1914), published by the Wagner y Levien printing house and edited by Campa, was the first to achieve lasting success.³³ Under this approach, the abundant music coverage in the daily press was largely disregarded.

Cultural historian Olivia Moreno Gamboa demonstrated, however, that musical journals did exist throughout the second half of the century. She identified ten newspapers of this kind published in Mexico City between 1866 and 1909, including the *Gaceta Musical*. Her classification by decade shows that the 1870s saw the highest number, with six journals, followed by four in the 1880s, two in the 1890s and 1900s, and one in the 1860s. Moreno attributed the flourishing of the press in the 1870s to the cultural renaissance that accompanied the liberal Republic, particularly the literary sphere.³⁴ By contrast, she explained the decline after 1880 as the result of increasing specialisation in a society where ‘cultivated’ music reached only a small proportion of the middle and upper classes. Readers preferred to subscribe to daily newspapers, which included music coverage, rather than to specialised journals. She also noted that the lack of qualified collaborators limited the success of such ventures.³⁵ Although Moreno’s study is not exhaustive, it remains valuable as the only attempt to date at a comprehensive examination of musical journals in Mexico City.

While musicologists often dismissed daily press music criticism as writing of ‘poor quality,’ cultural historians have approached the press in ways that enrich our understanding of nineteenth-century Mexico’s diversity and complexity. Yet the disciplinary gap between historical musicology and cultural history remains tangible. One of the main problems is that music has been treated as an art independent from literature, with the result that music criticism in both daily newspapers and music journals was automatically excluded from catalogues. A telling example is Florian Toussaint’s catalogue of newspapers published between 1876 and 1910, reprinted in 2018 without revision. Originally produced two decades earlier, it continued to disregard music critics and newspapers, offering a narrow image of the

³³ Olivia Moreno Gamboa, *Una cultura en movimiento. La prensa musical de la ciudad de México (1866–1910)* (Mexico City: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2019), 72.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 71, 73–74.

Porfiriato and reducing its vibrant musical culture to a brief paragraph.³⁶ One of the few catalogues to include music criticism was the compilation of writings by Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera.³⁷ Similarly, Áurea Maya's *Labor periodística* (1994) made a significant contribution by collecting the daily press writings of composer-critic Melesio Morales, who until then had been largely neglected.³⁸

As noted above, the dominant approach to the study of music criticism in Mexico has been to privilege specialised music journals over the daily press. Yet most of the sources for this dissertation are drawn from newspapers outside that category. Musicologist Mark Everist, in questioning RIPM's narrow definition of the 'music press,' has emphasised the importance of including musical journals, daily newspapers, and non-musical periodicals, since critics wrote across a wide range of venues: 'both the daily press and especially the non-musical periodical press offer possibilities for the contextualisation of musical cultures and practices hitherto little explored.'³⁹ Campa, for example, published in liberal newspapers such as *La patria*, *El diario del hogar*, and *El nacional*; in literary journals such as *La juventud literaria* and the annual *La república de las letras*; and, more rarely, in music journals such as *El polífono* and the Spanish *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*. Beyond these titles, the number of publications and critics involved on both the national and international scale increases considerably. This dissertation also analyses the journal *La armonía* (1866–1867) alongside newspapers of the period, including the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*. By engaging with this broader corpus, the study reassesses Mexican music criticism beyond the narrow scope established by previous historiography, highlighting its richness, diversity, and transnational connections.

The Role of Musical Polemics

The role of musical polemics is another subject underestimated by Mexican scholars, who have often ignored the motives that gave rise to such quarrels—motives that are central to the present study. Musicologists have tended to dismiss polemical figures such as Campa in favour of critics more closely associated with pedagogy. Yet this distinction is problematic, since criticism itself was understood as a form of education for the listener. Irma Lombardo has argued that the creation of polemics was essential to political newspapers, where the exchange

³⁶ Florence Touissant Alcáraz, *Escena de prensa en el Porfiriato* (Mexico City: Editorial Elementum, 2018), 45–62.

³⁷ Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, *Obras VII: Crónicas y artículos. Obras de teatro, V (1890–1892)*, introduction, notes and index by Elvira López Aparicio (México City: UNAM, 1990).

³⁸ Melesio Morales, *Melesio Morales (1838–1909). Labor periodística*. Selection, introduction and notes by Áurea Maya (Mexico City: CENIDIM, 1994).

³⁹ Mark Everist, 'Music criticism in France,' *Revue belge de musicologie* 66 (2012): 77.

of opinions involved values such as ‘truth, justice, and reason.’⁴⁰ Nevertheless, two articles published in 2006 emphasised the didactic aspect of criticism above all else.

One of these, by Gloria Carmona, examined the criticism of Campa’s friend, the composer-critic Ricardo Castro (1864–1907). Carmona argued that professional music criticism emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, with Castro, Morales, and Campa as its principal exponents. She sought to differentiate Castro from Morales and Campa’s supposedly ‘objective’ criticism by valuing Castro’s more ‘subjective’ style, in which he expressed his feelings, impressions, and values. For Carmona, this ‘personal style’ made Castro’s writings more accessible to readers and more revealing of his compositional process. By contrast, she dismissed Campa’s criticism as ‘authoritative,’ ‘scholarly,’ and ‘pretentious.’⁴¹

Carmona’s article, however, raises methodological concerns: her comparative arguments lack theoretical grounding, and her interpretation oversimplifies both music criticism and the complex relationships among the critics. In reducing the intellectual dimension of Campa, Morales, and Castro, she overlooks their engagement as informed consumers of international music criticism. What she labels as scholarly or pretentious in Campa’s writings was, in fact, part of his effort to remain conversant with the latest debates in Europe. Data analysis shows that Campa frequently cited leading French critics such as Camille Bellaigue, Hugh Imbert, and Catulle Mendès, among others.

It is also worth noting that music criticism was not only circulated in newspapers but also in essay collections, a common practice among acclaimed critics. This was particularly the case with writings on Wagner, which were often republished in collected volumes.

Questions about the functions and virtues of criticism have likewise been addressed in more recent scholarship. Yael Bitrán has argued that a virtuous critic should embody the ‘pedagogical function’ described by Oscar Wilde in *The Critic as Artist*, a model she applied in comparing four Mexican critics of the twentieth century: Gerónimo Baqueiro Fóster, Junius, Elisa Kahan, and Antonio Alcáraz.⁴² While her study usefully foregrounds the pedagogical dimension of criticism, it raises methodological concerns: Wilde’s essay is not justified as a framework, the criteria for selecting the critics are not explained, and the analysis tends to

⁴⁰ Irma Lombardo, ‘La empresa liberal y el periodismo,’ quoted in Nora Pérez-Rayón, ‘La prensa liberal en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX,’ in *La república de las letras asomos a la cultura escrita del México decimonónico. Volumen II Publicaciones periódicas y otros impresos, vol. 2*, eds. Belem Clark de Lara and Elisa Speckman Guerra (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005), 153.

⁴¹ Gloria Carmona ‘Los artículos periodísticos de Ricardo Castro,’ *Heterofonía: revista de investigación musical*, no. 136–137 (2007): 87–95.

⁴² Yael Bitrán, ‘La crítica musical: el banquillo de los acusados o el asiento del jurado,’ *Pauta. Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 25, no. 97 (2006): 58.

reproduce gendered hierarchies by contrasting Kahan unfavourably with her male counterparts. This highlights the need to approach Mexican music criticism not through prescriptive ideals but in relation to its historical contexts and polemical functions.

Bitrán's article also reveals the anachronism of privileging the analytical side of criticism. Nineteenth-century Mexican critics generally avoided technical language; instead, they preferred literary and historical approaches. This contrasted with French, German, and English traditions, where the more abstract and intellectual mode of knowledge—*logos*—was dominant. In this respect, Mexican criticism resembled practices in the United States and Canada. As Mark McKnight has shown, while Eurocentric standards long dominated American criticism, reviews there tended to be 'more reportorial than analytical,' emphasising timeliness and accessibility rather than abstract reflection.⁴³

McKnight, however, also frames 'objective' and 'serious' criticism as the ideal, implicitly privileging analysis over other modes of writing. Highlighting this preference for abstract thinking is not accidental: as will be discussed in the following chapters, musical historicism proved more desirable than philosophical or analytical approaches in nineteenth-century Mexican criticism. At first sight, the virtues identified by Carmona and Bitrán may appear unrelated to the question of polemics. Yet there is a crucial connection: the rejection of philosophy and analysis reflected broader notions of identity. Members of the Mexican Philharmonic Society in 1866 identified with the Latin world and its classical heritage, presenting Mexico as the 'Italy of the Americas'. Campa, by contrast, distanced himself from this ideal and positioned himself as a defender of universalism. This tension between Latin affiliation and universalist aspiration provides an essential framework for the following chapters.

The Division between Critic and Literato

Other recurrent problems in the study of Mexican music criticism concern the division between *critic* and *literato*. The influence of men of letters as critics in the press—or 'chroniclers of musical events,' as they are often called—cannot be denied. Yet scholars of the Mexican press, and of the musical press in particular, have tended to separate writers into two groups: musicians and men of letters. From this perspective, *literatos* were perceived as dilettanti who lacked the training to write with the same authority as professional musicians. This distinction reflects the mindset of professionalisation that gradually took shape in the second half of the nineteenth century.

⁴³ Mark McKnight, 'Music Criticism in the United States and Canada up to the Second World War,' in *The Cambridge History of Music Criticism*, ed. Christopher Dingle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 293. The cursive letters are mine.

Mark Everist has reflected on similar issues in relation to French criticism. He observes that studies of nineteenth-century opera and instrumental music have often privileged the writings of authors with literary reputations, such as Stendhal, Gautier, or Berlioz. This is unproblematic if read as imaginative fiction judged by posterity, but it becomes problematic when such voices are treated as normative, since it is unclear to what extent they represented wider public opinion. A more representative picture, he suggests, might be found in the work of lesser-known or anonymous critics.⁴⁴ Everist's observation is relevant to Mexico, where historiography has often reduced the vast body of press criticism to a few canonical names—Ignacio M. Altamirano, Guillermo Prieto, or Gutiérrez Nájera (*El Duque Job*)—or to composer-critics such as Morales, Alfredo Bablot, Castro, and Campa himself. Anonymous and pseudonymous authors have largely been ignored.

Yet anonymity and pseudonymity were in fact part of broader European practices. According to the *Dictionnaire de la musique* (2001), amateur critics in the eighteenth century frequently published unsigned articles, a tradition that persisted into the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ Mid-century practices increasingly included pseudonyms, while by the late century 'serious' writers, such as Campa, signed with their full names. Revealing one's identity became a marker of authority, a criterion that has shaped which critics scholars choose to consider or disregard. In Mexico, the field of press studies is well developed, yet catalogues often exclude musicians. An example is the ambitious *Diccionario de seudónimos* (2000) by María del Carmen Castañeda and Sergio Márquez Acevedo.⁴⁶

In the last decade, international scholarship has emphasised the need to take into account a broader spectrum of critics, including non-specialists. In *Reading Critics Reading* (2001), Katharine Ellis highlighted the case of Julien-Louis Geoffroy, a dilettante who had been dismissed in his time but whose criticism nevertheless offered valuable insights. Though musically illiterate and conservative, Ellis argued, his judgements could be astute, showing sensitivity to style and cultural significance. For Ellis, such writings open a window into cultural history.⁴⁷ Her work has also expanded the field by including literary genres: she analysed short stories by Jules Janin, George Sand, Balzac, Berlioz, and Wagner, published in the *Revue et gazette musicale*. Written in the Romantic style of E. T. A. Hoffmann, these tales blended

⁴⁴ Mark Everist, *Giacomo Meyerbeer and Music Drama in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 17–18.

⁴⁵ 'Critique musicale,' in *Dictionnaire de la musique*, ed. Marc Vignal (Paris: Larousse, 2001), 267.

⁴⁶ María del Carmen Castañeda and Sergio Márquez Acevedo. *Diccionario de seudónimos, anagramas, iniciales y otros alias* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2000).

⁴⁷ Ellis, 'A Dilettante at the Opera: Issues in the Criticism of Julien-Louis Geoffroy, 1800–1814,' in *Reading Critics Reading: Opera and Ballet Criticism in France from the Revolution to 1848*, ed. Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 48.

biography and fiction to shape musical canons.⁴⁸ This Romantic genre was also adopted by the editors of *La armonía* (1866–1867), who used it to construct a national pantheon of composers and disseminate historical knowledge. Years later, Campa would employ the same device in his obituary of Liszt to veil his criticism of Mexico's lack of support for its own artists.

This demonstrates that Mexican music criticism cannot be understood solely through the lens of professionalised categories that privilege musicians over men of letters. Rather, it must also be studied in relation to literary, anonymous, and pseudonymous practices that shaped both the production and reception of musical discourse.

New Approaches to Music Criticism in Mexico

In recent years, the study of music criticism in Mexico has moved beyond rigid categories such as composer-critic versus man of letters, specialist journals versus the daily press, or professional versus dilettante, towards approaches that better reflect the boundaries in use during the nineteenth century itself. Armando Gómez Rivas's doctoral dissertation analysed the press of 1892, the year that commemorated four centuries since the discovery of the Americas. His research acknowledged the diversity of critics and opinions, identifying similarities of language and grouping critics into three categories. Particularly valuable was his inclusion of anonymous authors and the newspapers for which they worked, as well as his conclusion that the criticism of 1892 revealed both a nationalistic tendency that resisted transcontinental ideals and a widespread sense of social discontent.⁴⁹

More broadly, scholars have sought to define what made a *music critic* and what kind of content they produced. With the flourishing of the discipline in recent decades, some Spanish-speaking researchers have adopted the French term *critique musicale* as an umbrella to include multiple practices, mostly aesthetic.⁵⁰ Yet nineteenth-century Mexican critics themselves used a wider range of terms that reflected their place in the hierarchy of the press. At the lower end, *gacetillero* and *cronista* were associated with more routine or reportorial work, while *crítico* and

⁴⁸ Katharine Ellis, 'The Uses of Fiction: Contes and nouvelles in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 1834–1844,' *Revue de Musicologie* 90, no. 2 (2004): 253–281; Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, 1834–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴⁹ Armando Gómez Rivas, *Crítica musical en México, 1892* (Doctoral dissertation, Universidad Nacional de México, 2019).

⁵⁰ According to the *Larousse Dictionnaire de la musique*, musical criticism is understood as a literary activity that provides the reader with both information and a personal assessment of a musical event—whether a concert, a recording, or the publication of a book. Depending on the nature of the event, the critic's expertise and concerns, and the type of periodical in which it appears (a daily newspaper or a specialist journal), criticism may stand in closer or looser relation to journalism, literature, musicology, or aesthetics. 'Critique musicale,' in *Dictionnaire de la musique*, ed. Marc Vignal (Paris: Larousse, 2001), 267.

literato musical signalled higher intellectual and cultural authority. This hierarchy helps explain why Campa dismissed much of the contemporary press as dilettantism and instead aspired to a specialised type of criticism. Particularly telling is the now-obsolete label *literato musical*, which Campa and his friend, the Spanish critic Felipe Pedrell (1841–1922), employed to describe themselves. The term invested the critic with status both as musician and as man of letters, bridging the worlds of music and literature—an identity also claimed by figures such as Berlioz, Wagner, or Saint-Saëns. This perspective resonates with broader scholarship that has urged historians of criticism to move beyond professionalised categories and to recognise the plurality of critical practices.⁵¹

These new approaches highlight the need to understand Mexican criticism not only in its local hierarchies, but also in relation to the European authorities and translations through which critics positioned themselves in global debates.

European Intellectual Authority and Transatlantic Networks

The revision of Campa's participation in the polemic known in Mexican history as *Italianistas contra francesistas* provides an important framework for studying the intellectual content of music criticism, since Campa and other critics involved were highly erudite. Yet, his interventions cannot be separated from the broader intellectual project of the Mexican Philharmonic Society, whose journal *La armonía* had already articulated ideals of civilisation, progress, and specialisation in the 1860s. Admiration for European intellectual authorities was a cornerstone of this milieu, and Mexican critics often cited the opinions of such authorities on 'masterpieces' rather than formulating independent judgements. This reliance on European references, frequently mediated through translation, offers a privileged vantage point for analysing the transatlantic transfer of ideas. My argument is that Campa's interest in musical progress and civilisation was part of a broader attempt to address the tensions in the construction of a musical national identity in late nineteenth-century Mexico, tensions that resonated with intellectuals in other nations. In this sense, his writings must be situated within international networks that presented Wagnerism as a model of musical regeneration for countries perceived as stagnant.

The dissertation develops this argument across four chapters. Chapter 1 analyses *La armonía* (1866–1867), the journal of the Mexican Philharmonic Society, to show how notions of

⁵¹ Sandra McColl, *Music Criticism in Vienna 1896–1897: Critically Moving Forms* (New York: Clarendon Press Oxford, 1996), vi–viii; Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart, eds., *Reading Critics Reading: Opera and Ballet Criticism in France from the Revolution to 1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Christopher Dingle, ed., *The Cambridge History of Music Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

progress, specialisation, and civilisation were articulated within a Romantic philosophy that presented Mexico as a sick nation in need of healing. Chapter 2 examines the polemics surrounding Campa between 1883 and 1887, highlighting how his image as the ‘Mexican Wagner’ crystallised around his opposition to the Italian school and his promotion of Franco-German values. Chapter 3 focuses on Campa’s exchange with Felipe Pedrell between 1888 and 1889, revealing the ideological as well as emotional dimensions of their progressist campaign in Mexico and Spain, and the resistance it provoked among Mexican critics such as Melesio Morales and Ildefonso de Olano. Chapter 4 analyses Campa’s engagement with Latin and French Wagnerism, including his translations of Saint-Saëns and other critics, to show how he adapted European debates to the Mexican context and reframed the question of modernisation.

Importantly, what is truly original about the Mexican engagement with Wagner lies in its selective adaptation of European models to local contexts and personal agendas, rather than in the emergence of a coherent nationalist movement. While references to Wagner circulated among Mexico’s cultural elites in the 1880s, these engagements functioned more as a fashionable marker of sophistication than as a structured musical programme. This bespoke ‘Wagnerism’ allowed figures like Campa to appropriate European ideas in ways that resonated locally, without the ideological or nationalist frameworks characteristic of German or French Wagnerism.

In conclusion, this study opens new perspectives on three interrelated areas: first, the transatlantic circulation of ideas, which challenges the centre–periphery model that has long portrayed Mexican elites as passive recipients of European culture; second, the role of international intellectual networks in shaping local music criticism; and third, the possibility of re-examining the nineteenth century as a period when Mexican intellectuals participated in wider communities of identity and debate.

Chapter 1 Civilisation, Music, and

Cosmopolitanism in *La Armonía* (1866–1867)

The Mexican Philharmonic Society (MPS) emerged in January 1866, directly following the success of *Ildegonda*, an opera by Mexican composer Melesio Morales (1838–1908).¹ This triumph, achieved despite the resistance of the Italian impresario Anibal Biacchi, inspired a group of musicians, intellectuals, and dilettanti to establish a legal association that would promote music as both an art and a civic duty. Their project soon expanded: in July 1866, they founded the Conservatorio de Música (Conservatoire of Music)—an institution that later became the National Conservatoire of Music in 1876.²

The early history of the MPS unfolded in a Mexico torn by war. The Monarchist regime of Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg (1832–1867), supported by Emperor Napoleon III of France (1808–1873), clashed with the Republican forces loyal to President Benito Juárez (1806–1872).³ The instability of these years deeply marked cultural life in the capital. Yet, in the midst of political turmoil, the Philharmonic Society—a small group of intellectuals based in Mexico City—launched *La armonía* (November 1866), considered the first music journal in nineteenth-century Mexico. It was a musical periodical that published a total of thirteen issues, each consisting of eight pages. Edited by a board of MPS members—including José Ignacio Durán (vice-president of the MPS and president of the editorial board), Gabino F. Bustamante (doctor and vice-president of the editorial board), Agustín Siliceo (lawyer and secretary), Aniceto Ortega (doctor and composer), and Alfredo Bablot (critic and composer)—the journal functioned as the Society’s official voice, a pedagogical tool, and a vehicle for articulating its broader cultural mission. Its structure closely mirrored contemporary European journals, such as the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, combining history, aesthetics, reviews, international news, and scores by Mexican composers.⁴

¹ Melesio Morales’s opera *Ildegonda* premiered in January 1866 at the National Theatre in Mexico City.

² The Conservatoire of the MPS merged earlier schools and became the National Conservatoire of Music in 1876. See also, Luisa de María Zanolli Fabila, *La profesionalización de la enseñanza musical en México: El Conservatorio Nacional de Música (1866–1996). Su historia y su vinculación con el arte, la ciencia y la tecnología en el contexto nacional*. Vol. 1 (Mexico City: INBA, 2017). For a history written a century earlier, see: Alba Herrera y Ogazón, *El arte musical en México*, facsimile ed. [1917] (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cenidim, 1992).

³ On the conflict between Maximilian and Juárez, see: Charles A. Hale, *El liberalismo mexicano en la época de Mora (1821–1853)* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 1972). See also Edward Shawcross, *The Last Emperor of Mexico: A Disaster in the New World* (London: Faber & Faber, 2022), a recent narrative history that complements the academic literature.

⁴ An analysis of the journal also reveals a substantial use of international sources, referenced in articles, short stories, and international news sections. Among the musical and non-musical journals cited were

This chapter examines how the MPS, through *La armonía*, engaged with narratives of civilisation, progress, and cosmopolitanism in Mexico City during 1866–67. While the journal contained a wide variety of texts, this study focuses on articles that introduce the Society, essays on history and biography, fictional stories, and reports on choral projects. Together, these writings show how the MPS sought to position music as a tool for human flourishing, a modern and secular form of education, and a medium for embedding Romantic ideals in Mexican society.

Unlike conventional musical historiography, which privileges ‘professional’ composers, this chapter highlights the polymathic figures of the Society, for whom music formed part of a wider intellectual and civic agenda. Their use of international sources—from Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) and François-Joseph Fétis (1784–1871) to French journals such as *La France chorale* and *Les Musées des familles*—underscores the cosmopolitan orientation of the project.⁶ Given the diversity of themes covered in the journal—from concert reviews to fictional and historical narratives, with very few analytical essays—my analysis concentrates on selected case studies that reveal how the MPS constructed its ideologies around civilisation and progress.

The chapter begins by examining how the Society presented itself to Mexicans, situating this self-representation within a liberal framework that connected music with education, philanthropy, and national healing. I then turn to the role of history and biography in shaping ideas about genius, education, and struggle, focusing particularly on the writings of Luis F. Muñoz Ledo (writer, poet, librettist, and critic), Aniceto Ortega (physician, composer, and writer), and Manuel María Ortíz de Montellanos (lawyer and writer).⁷ Their stories of European composers—Mozart, Stradella, and a Hoffmann-inspired fantasy—illustrate different attitudes toward Romantic notions of art, morality, and imagination, central to the progressive ideal of civilisation. The final section explores the Society’s view on the superiority of vocal music over instrumental forms and how this conviction led to the formation of male choral societies, giving way to the Mexican Orpheonic movement.⁵

This study argues that the Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana promoted the notion that music played a crucial role in the process of civilisation by advancing ideas of human

several francophone publications, including *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, *La France chorale*, *La Musique populaire*, *La France musicale*, *Le Guide musical*, *Les Mondes*, *Le Monde illustré*, and *Les Musées des familles*, as well as the Spanish-language *El correo de ultramar*. Contributors such as Luis F. Muñoz Ledo cited the French music critic François-Joseph Fétis, alongside local intellectuals, while other collaborators translated works by French Enlightenment philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
⁵ The term *orphéon* referred to male choirs founded on social and philanthropic ideals, intended to enhance the lives of workers through musical education and collective singing.

flourishing, modern secular education, and Romantic historicism. The writings in *La armonía* synthesised utilitarian principles with Romantic ideals, inspiring subprojects of social and cultural improvement; they also championed progressive pedagogical practices and propagated the Romantic vision of the musician as philosopher-poet, thereby contributing to the creation of a local musical canon. My analysis focuses not only on music as sound, but on how it was written about, imagined, and intertwined with literature, education, and civic identity. By reading essays, biographies, and fictional stories, I show how the society used music to articulate liberal and cosmopolitan ideals, ultimately presenting it as a universal language capable of fostering both national pride and global belonging within a narrative of civilisation and progress.

Presenting the Mexican Philharmonic Society (MPS) to Mexicans

Manuel Siliceo (-), a moderate liberal and the first president of the MPS, introduced the group as a philharmonic society established to serve Mexican society:

When only a few months ago some friends, enthusiasts for the progress of the musical sciences, [...] conceived the idea of forming an association [...] with the conviction that they were attempting to do good, with the enthusiasm that such conviction excites in hearts inclined to it, with the ardent desire to contribute, even if on the smallest scale, to the good name and glories of this poor Mexico, so little known or so gratuitously slandered, they leapt over the difficulties, gave birth to their organic statute, and resolved, with faith and perseverance, to step into the arena and fight until they triumphed.⁶

The circle to which Siliceo referred was initially a distinguished gathering at a soirée that brought together musicians and dilettanti. In December 1865, this circle evolved into a social movement aimed at defending the local composer Melesio Morales against the Italian impresario Anibal Biacchi, who had refused to stage Morales's latest opera, *Ildegonda*. Biacchi justified his decision by claiming that producing a Mexican opera would reduce his profits. Ultimately, the group persuaded Biacchi to reconsider, and *Ildegonda* was performed at the Teatro Nacional (National Theatre) in January 1866. The MPS was officially founded in the same month.

Through the motto *Utile et dulci* ('Useful and agreeable'), these friends established the MPS to contribute to Mexican society's improvement. The aim was to promote music education and to provide financial support to music teachers. The motto, derived from Horace's *Ars*

⁶ 'Cuando apenas hace unos cuantos meses, algunos amigos, entusiastas por el progreso de las ciencias músicas, [...] tuvieron el pensamiento de formar una asociación [...] con la convicción de que intentaban hacer el bien, con el entusiasmo que esa convicción excita en los corazones inclinados a él, con el ardiente deseo de contribuir, aunque fuese en muy pequeña escala, al buen nombre y a las glorias de este pobre México, tan poco conocido o tan gratuitamente calumniado, saltaron sobre las dificultades, dieron a luz su reglamento orgánico y se propusieron con fe y con constancia descender a la arena y combatir hasta vencer.' Manuel Siliceo, 'Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana, *La armonía*, no. 1 (1 November 1866): 1.

Poetica, reflects the MPS's philosophy, which integrates both the educational and recreational aspects of music. However, Siliceo provided little detail regarding the MPS's practical approach to combining utility and pleasure. It was Gabino Bustamante (-), doctor and vice-president of *La armonía*'s editorial board, who elaborated on the matter in the fourth issue. Bustamante noted that some initially dismissed the MPS as a mere source of entertainment to distract from the hardships of war.⁷ However, in early nineteenth century Latin America, a period during which many countries were gaining independence from the Spanish Empire, a Philharmonic Society was far more than a group of musicians seeking amusement. José Manuel Izquierdo König argues that the term *Philharmonic Society* encompassed a range of semi-public subscription concerts, dance sessions, and private recitals, with specific functions varying according to local traditions and laws. Drawing on William Weber's definition of eighteenth-century European philharmonic societies, Izquierdo König describes the purpose of Latin American philharmonic societies as ensuring the continuation of musical performances in contexts where neither political power nor economic resources were sufficient to sustain a formal concert season.⁸

Moreover, the motto *Utile et dulci* is interconnected with a philanthropic ethos. Siliceo articulated the MPS's philanthropic philosophy, which was defined by its 'useful, selfless, and humanitarian' orientation. Both the motto and this philanthropic vision underscored the institution's role as a liberal civic group, positioning music not merely as a form of entertainment but as a catalyst for social transformation. This philosophy aligns with the tradition of Liberalism of Flourishing or Human Flourishing, a strand of liberal thought.⁹ Human Flourishing asserts that art plays a fundamental role in individual development, benefiting society and fostering progress. Menachem Mautner argues that *Liberalism of Flourishing* has its roots in Aristotelian thought and later developed into two branches: the intellectual-moralists and the comprehensives, both of which focus on improving individuals' quality of life. The first branch is particularly relevant to this dissertation, as it shaped the thinking of the figures examined in this and the following chapters. While John Stuart Mill is often credited as a key figure in the theory of Human Flourishing, other influential thinkers include Scottish Enlightenment philosophers, the Romantic German *Bildung* tradition (rooted in the Greek ideal called *Paideia*), and Matthew Arnold's theories of criticism. According to Mautner, all of these thinkers emphasised 'the development of the intellectual and moral capabilities of individuals' within a free environment

⁷ Gabino F. Bustamante, 'La Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana. Su origen y tendencias,' *La armonía*, no. 4 (15 December 1866): 25.

⁸ José Manuel Izquierdo König, 'The Cosmopolitan Muse. Searching for a Musical Style in Early Nineteenth-Century Latin America,' in *Music History and Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Anastasia Belina, Kaarina Kilpiö and Derek B. Scott (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 65.

⁹ For a conceptual history of liberalism in nineteenth century, see: Michael Freeden, Javier Fernández-Sebatán and Jörn Leonhard, eds., *In Search of European Liberalisms. Concepts, Languages, Ideologies*. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019).

that enables citizens to realise their potential.¹⁰ In Human flourishing framework, art is seen as integral to individual development, fostering creativity in various fields, including the arts, science, and technology. Liberalism of Flourishing views art as essential to the ideal of a ‘good life’. Accordingly, the state should provide educational materials as well as the social and cultural conditions necessary for individuals to cultivate their talents, thereby contributing to a harmonious society.¹¹

The idea that governments should provide citizens with the conditions necessary for flourishing was central to the MPS and to Mexican artists of the late nineteenth century. María Emilia Ismael-Simental has examined the influence of Romantic thought as a political and social force in the creation of secular musical institutions during the early years of Mexico as a modern state. She argues that Philharmonic Societies across Hispanic America ‘were one of the associational practices through which local elites promoted a cultural sphere (including journals, theatres, orchestras, opera companies, philharmonic societies, concert societies, and foreign clubs)’¹² and that they influenced the social organisation of local communities. Over time, these societies ‘became educational benchmarks and the foundational structures of national institutions.’¹³ Philharmonic Societies sought ‘to define a private institutionalisation distinct from public institutions and to integrate a civil society with an identity and ideological function projected through their conceptions and attitudes regarding the nature of the individual and society, the arts, secularism, and inclusion’.¹⁴ Therefore, the MPS was established as a private civil society¹⁵ to promote cultural progress and national pride in a civilised world.

¹⁰ Menachem Mautner, *Human Flourishing, Liberal Theory, and the Arts: a Liberalism of Flourishing* (London: Routledge, 2018), 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7–9.

¹² ‘fueron una de las prácticas asociacionistas con que las élites locales promovieron un ámbito cultural (que incluía revistas, teatros, orquestas, compañías de óperas, sociedades filarmónicas, sociedades de conciertos y clubes extranjeros’ María Emilia Ismael-Simental, ‘El romanticismo y la institucionalización de la música en México en el siglo XIX,’ in *Más allá del amor, la nostalgia, la pasión y el éxtasis... El romanticismo en México, siglo XIX*, ed. Laura Suárez de la Torre (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora; Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología, 2020), 160.

¹³ ‘se convirtieron en los referentes educativos y las estructuras iniciales de las instituciones nacionales.’ *Ibid.*, 160–161.

¹⁴ ‘demarcar una institucionalización privada diferenciada de la pública, e integrar una sociedad civil con una identidad y función ideológica que se proyecta a partir de sus concepciones y actitudes respecto de la naturaleza del individuo y la sociedad, de las artes, el laicismo y la inclusión.’ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁵ Micheal Edwards references Michael Walzer’s widely cited definition: ‘civil society is the sphere of uncoerced human association between the individual and the state, in which people undertake collective action for normative and substantive purposes, relatively independent of government and the market.’ For a discussion on civil society as a complex concept with various definitions and interpretations, see: Michael Edwards, ‘Introduction. Civil Society and the Geometry of Human Relations,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*, ed. Michael Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–4. For an examination of the historical development of civil society and the process of civilisation in modern times, see: John Ehrenberg, ‘The History of Civil Society Ideas,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*, ed. Michael Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18–23. For an analysis of Philharmonic

Manuel Siliceo argued that protecting music was essential to Mexico's healing. The belief that music was the most esteemed of the arts and warranted protection was central to the MPS, reflecting key Romantic ideals.¹⁶ Firstly, music was regarded as having therapeutic properties; just as physicians treated the body with medicine, musicians were thought to heal the soul through their art. Furthermore, medical practitioners played a crucial role in shaping this understanding of music's restorative power. In February 1866, the MPS convened a solemn ceremony at the School of Medicine to bid farewell to opera singer Ángela Peralta (1845–1883) and composer Morales, who were soon to depart for Europe. During this event, Aniceto Ortega (1825–1875), a doctor, pianist, and composer, delivered a speech emphasising the parallel significance of medicine and music 'Does music deserve less effort than medicine? Certainly not. If medicine seeks to alleviate human suffering, then music is responsible for sweetening and ennobling the heart.'¹⁷ The notion of harmonising individuals as a means of promoting social stability was a recurring theme in the discourses published in *La armonía*. The relationship between music, the body, and medical sciences has a long and well-established tradition. James Kennaway examines how evolving notions of listening have shaped medical thought on music. From antiquity to the seventeenth century, medical discourse considered music's effects on the body's humours and its role within a broader cosmic harmony, which extended to the treatment of ailments affecting the soul.¹⁸ Mark A. Pottinger introduces the notion that nineteenth century discourse on music and medical sciences was rooted in the belief that 'the sciences and the arts went beyond external realities to define a hidden or unseen inner reality – a vision that is at the heart of Romanticism'. The physicality of both music-making and listening became integral to understanding the body's inner health. Inspired by this idea, medical student Hector Berlioz incorporated anatomical research into his conducting techniques, aiming to translate the composer's intentions through the orchestra's collective body.¹⁹ Sarah Collins, in tracing the notion of a universal world, observes 'both the promise and caution' of music's power to control the passions. An idea central to Enlightenment thought,

Societies as civil institutions shaped by Romantic thought, see: Ismael-Simental, 'El romanticismo y la institucionalización...', 163–66.

¹⁶ For key Romantic ideals, see: Jim Samson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Paul Watt, Sarah Collins, and Michael Allis, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Intellectual Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹⁷ '¿La música merecerá menores esfuerzos que la medicina? No, sin duda alguna. Si ésta se ocupa de aliviar al hombre en sus dolores, aquella se encarga de endulzar y ennoblecer su corazón.' 'Remitido. Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana,' *La sociedad*, 3 March 1866, 1.

¹⁸ James Kennaway, 'Music and the Body in the History of Medicine,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and the Body*, ed. Sander L. Gilman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 334–38.

¹⁹ Mark A. Pottinger, 'Introduction. Music, Medical Science and the Body,' *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 19, no. 1 (2022): 3

which was inherited from the Classical antiquity.²⁰ The Society's vision was more closely aligned with the ancient Greek philosophical notion of cosmic order, wherein music was not merely an artistic pursuit but a fundamental means of restoring harmony to a society.²¹

This idea of harmony also resonated with a broader nineteenth-century understanding of knowledge and civilisation. Unlike national and musical historiographies, which tend to focus on 'professional' musicians and composers, this study considers individuals as educated figures for whom civilisation was synonymous with universal knowledge. Polymathy was a characteristic of the nineteenth-century intellectual press, characterised by individuals who contributed to the humanities while also engaging with the natural sciences. As Steven Shapin describes it, this age was 'the true age of the man of letters, in other words, an individual who (besides writing poems, plays or novels) made contributions to the humanities and showed an interest in the natural sciences.'²² In this context, MPS members engaged in diverse areas of knowledge and played multiple roles within the Society, both within and beyond *La armonía*.

The MPS championed the idea of music as a universal art, envisioning a cosmopolitan society defined by diversity and reflecting the civil conduct of an educated individual within a heterogeneous environment. This was made possible, as Pottinger argues, because music 'broke down barriers of national tradition, historical style, or even individuality, so that what one heard within the music was not a particularity but a universal sound shared by all'.²³ With this perspective in mind, Siliceo introduced an inclusive group that welcomed individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, nationalities, and social classes. Concluding his presentation of the MPS, Siliceo urged readers to join the society, emphasising its openness:

²⁰ Sarah Collins, 'The National and the Universal,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Intellectual Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Paul Watt, Sarah Collins, and Michael Allis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 374–75.

²¹ The MPS philosophical notion of cosmic order as a restorative force contrast with other nineteenth century discussions around the negative effects of the body's musical overstimulation. As Pottinger further elucidates, Romantic ideology often portrayed the artist as a suffering figure, intertwined with the notion of the physical body as a vessel of pain, which in turn shaped musical expression. Bodily suffering informed compositional language while simultaneously evoking empathy in the listener. Kennaway, on the other hand, investigates nineteenth century debates surrounding the effects of music on health, particularly concerns regarding excessive music-making and its potential dangers. He explores the prevailing belief that talented musicians were predisposed to nervous disorders, not only due to the intensity of their musical engagement but also as a consequence of their inherent nature. Kennaway provides extensive case studies of so-called 'mad geniuses,' including Mozart, Schumann, Donizetti, and Paganini, whose afflictions or eccentric behaviours were frequently linked to their artistic temperament. See: Pottinger, 'Introduction. Music, Medical Science and the Body,' 4; and Kennaway, 'Music and the Body in the History of Medicine,' 340–41.

²² Steven Shapin, 'The Man of Science,' in *Early Modern Science*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, vol. 3 of *The Cambridge History of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 179–91, cited in Peter Burke, *The polymath: a cultural history from Leonardo Da Vinci to Susan Sontag* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 88.

²³ Pottinger, 'Introduction. Music, Medical Science and the Body,' 4.

Chapter 1

At the Society, there is no distinction among nationalities, political parties, or genre exclusion: decency, kindness, manners in a distinguished society, a stimulus to talent, diligent and well-directed learning, are aims that everyone can achieve, and are offered to those who come into our bosom.²⁴

This declaration summarized the Society's core vision of promoting cultural progress and national pride through music, serving as a unifying force in a society deeply fractured by political divisions and military intervention. A central expression of this vision was the Society's preference for vocal over instrumental music, a priority that shaped both its repertoire and its pedagogical choices.

While these ideals framed the Society's self-presentation, in practice the MPS originated as a small group of *dilettanti* and musicians in January 1866. By November, membership had grown, exceeding four hundred names, as documented in *La armonía*—which classified members into five categories: amateurs (*aficionados*), patrons (*protectores*), men of letters (*literatos*), teachers of music (*profesores*), and honorary members (*honorarios*).²⁵ Such inclusivity was only possible in Mexico City, itself a capital shaped by a steady flow of migration. Among the society's members were Spanish, French, Italian, Belgian, Austrian, and German settlers, some of whom had resided in Mexico prior to the French intervention and Maximilian's monarchy. Notable figures included the German choir conductor Teodoro Leede, French Alfredo Bablot—an active member of the MPS who later became director of the National Conservatoire in 1882—and German Agustín Wagner, founder of the music publishing house Wagner y Levien, which became a cornerstone of Mexico's musical life in the late nineteenth century. Additionally, the society attracted military officers, musicians from the Austrian and Belgian military bands, scientists, and politicians. This breadth of membership reflected the organisation's cosmopolitan orientation and was further underscored by the appointment of Franz Liszt as its first honorary member—an honour he accepted. The aspiration for civilisation was not only prevalent among Mexicans in 1866 but remained a dominant concern throughout the rest of the century.

²⁴ 'en la Sociedad no hay distinción de nacionalidades, ni división de partidos, ni exclusión de ningún género: la decencia, la amabilidad, los modales de una sociedad distinguida, el estímulo al talento, al estudio empeñoso y bien dirigido, son las garantías que, al alcance de todos, se ofrecen a los que quieren venir a ingresar a su seno.' Manuel Siliceo, 'Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana,' *La armonía*, no. 1 (1 November 1866): 2.

²⁵ 'Lista alfabética de los señores socios protectores de la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana,' *La armonía*, no. 3 (1 December 1866): 24; 'Lista alfabética de los señores socios aficionados de la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana,' *La armonía*, no. 4 (15 December 1866): 32; 'Lista alfabética de los señores socios literatos de la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana,' *La armonía*, no. 5 (1 January 1867): 40; 'Lista alfabética de los señores socios profesores de la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana,' *La armonía*, no. 5 (1 January 1867): 40.

Manuel Siliceo had emphasised that Mexico was a nation falsely accused of stagnation. The content published in *La armonía* reveals that the MPS was careful to avoid comments addressing political affiliations or attributing blame for Mexico's situation. Nonetheless, Siliceo expressed his ideological stance in a letter addressed to Maximilian in 1865, arguing that Mexico's lack of progress was a consequence of its colonial past. As a liberal monarch, Maximilian placed significant emphasis on education, appointing Siliceo as Minister of Public Instruction to restructure the ministry. In his directive, Maximilian declared 'It is my will that public education, drawing upon the experience of the most advanced nations, be established in the Mexican Empire on a foundation that places us alongside the foremost nations.'²⁶

One of the main outcomes of this initiative was the provision of free elementary public education. In response, Siliceo stated in a letter published in the government's official daily, *El diario del imperio*:

At the time of Mexico's independence, public education—particularly primary education, which is indisputably the most important—was in a lamentable state of neglect. This was partly because, at that time, the rulers of New Spain could only teach what they themselves knew, and partly because it was in their political interest to keep the lower classes in ignorance and to ensure that the large indigenous population remained in a state of subjugation.²⁷

The idea that Mexico remained an uncivilised nation due to both internal and external interests was a recurring theme within Mexican liberal thought, as Charles A. Hale has demonstrated in *El liberalismo Mexicano en la época de Mora (1821-1853)*.²⁸ However, government reports published in *El diario del imperio* indicate that music was not recognised as a serious profession. As previously discussed, a liberal government was expected to provide an appropriate foundation for its citizens. In line with its mission 'to protect music,' as the MPS described its efforts, the Society established a private Conservatoire of Music to address this deficiency. Earlier attempts to institutionalise music as a profession had been unsuccessful. The MPS Conservatoire was inaugurated on 1 July 1866, merging various music schools in the city, including the Academy of Drawing, founded by José María Azcárate and directed by Luz

²⁶ 'Es mi voluntad que la instrucción pública, aprovechando la experiencia adquirida por los pueblos más adelantados, sea puesta en el Imperio Mexicano bajo un pie que nos coloque al lado de las primeras naciones.' Maximiliano, 'Parte oficial. Carta de S. M. el Emperador al Sr. Ministro Siliceo, sobre la Instrucción Pública,' *El diario del imperio*, 14 June 1865, 136.

²⁷ 'La instrucción pública en México, al hacerse la independencia, sobre todo la primaria, que sin discusión es la más importante, se hallaba en un atraso lamentable, ya porque en aquella época los dominadores de la nueva España no podían enseñar más de lo que sabían, ya porque formase parte de su política conservar en la ignorancia a las clases populares y en el embrutecimiento a la numerosa población indígena.' M. Siliceo, 'Parte oficial. Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Cultos,' *El diario del imperio*, 18 July 1865, 57–60.

²⁸ Charles A. Hale, *El liberalismo mexicano en la época de Mora*, 308–9.

Oropesa, and the Academy of Music, established by Agustín Caballero and Joaquín Beristain in the 1830s and reopened in 1864.

The Mexican Philharmonic Society presented itself as an organisation operating without government support. However, it is important to note that it did receive backing from the City Council (*Ayuntamiento*), as other scholars have highlighted.²⁹ Furthermore, while some members of the Society held high-ranking positions in the federal government, others worked for the City Council, including the Society's treasurer, Timoteo Fernández de Jáuregui.

The MPS evoked patriotic sentiments. As previously discussed, liberal Mexicans actively promoted the image of an independent nation, fostering a sense of national pride. This sentiment was reflected in the inaugural address delivered by Agustín Caballero, the first director of the Conservatoire of Music of the MPS and the former director of the music schools that merged into the Conservatoire. In his speech, Caballero emphasised that 'great and noble nations' had always safeguarded and promoted music, asserting that Mexico was no exception. He remarked that:

In our beautiful country, blessed with such a delightful climate and sky, the fine arts are destined to flourish and develop extraordinarily. If this perspective were ours alone, it might be dismissed as mere patriotism; however, it is shared by all enlightened foreigners who visit our land without prejudice and express their opinions impartially. Furthermore, Italy, with a climate, sky, and circumstances similar to our own, serves as proof of this assertion. [/] For this reason, the establishment of a conservatoire—one that provides the necessary resources for the instruction and cultivation of musical genius—has been, and will always remain, an essential need among us.³⁰

Although Caballero's reliance on foreign validation appears paradoxical from a national perspective, his comment should be interpreted under the idea of constructing a universal community based on how others appreciate Mexico. Sarah Collins explores the concept of the *world* as conceived in *Weltliteratur* and universal history to understand the idea of a universal musical community. This process relied on a framework of cultural difference that placed

²⁹ Cecilia Vargas Ramírez, *La utilidad y el recreo: un estudio sobre sociabilidades en la Ciudad de México a través de la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana, 1866–1877* (Master's thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2019); and Berenice Ramírez Lago, "*Gran concierto vocal, instrumental y de orfeonismo para la noche de este viernes*": *la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana como promotora de conciertos, Ciudad de México, 1866–1877* (Master's thesis, Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2022).

³⁰ 'Nuestro bello país con un clima y un cielo tan delicioso, las bellas artes están llamadas a crecer y desarrollarse de una manera prodigiosa. Esta opinión que si fuera solo nuestra podría atribuirse al amor propio, la tienen igualmente todos los extranjeros ilustrados, que visitan nuestro suelo sin prevención, y emiten sus opiniones con imparcialidad. Además, la Italia con un cielo, clima y circunstancias semejantes a las nuestras, es un ejemplo que lo comprueba. [/] Por esto mismo ha sido una necesidad y lo será siempre entre nosotros el establecimiento de un conservatorio que presente los elementos necesarios a la instrucción y fomento del genio filarmónico.' 'Discurso pronunciado por el Sr. Director del Conservatorio de la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana, D. Agustín Caballero, en la solemne apertura de este establecimiento,' *La armonía*, no. 2 (15 November 1866): 10.

societies along a historical trajectory of development. This perspective reflects the broader historical consciousness of the period, which was shaped by increased mobility and cross-cultural encounters. Consequently, historical inquiry was closely linked to the comparative method, driven by a desire to gather and synthesise diverse aspects of humanity into a unified, universal narrative.³¹ Traveler's enlightened humanism shaped music historiography in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This influence is appreciated in the reinterpretation of 'non-Western' cultures within a universalist framework, which subsequently contributed to the establishment of music history as a scientific discipline. Examining the works of Guillaume Villoteau, Edward William Lane, and Philip Bohlman, Collins highlights that Western scholars often perceived Islamic culture—believed to have originated from Greek civilisation—as a fundamental component of European history. Within this framework, non-Western musical traditions were not necessarily dismissed as 'primitive'; rather, they were understood as preserving an inherent simplicity reflective of an earlier stage in human development.³²

Caballero's comparison of Mexico and Italy in terms of climate and fertile soil is particularly significant. Such analogies reveal how patriotic discourse in Mexico was often framed comparatively, situating the nation within broader Latin American and European narratives. As Adelaide Machado and Júlio Rodrigues da Silva observe, in the nineteenth century 'the idea of belonging to a particular region, country, continent, or even particular planet would be cumulatively and harmonically interwoven into the awareness of each individual,' and 'there was no contradiction between loving one's country and being patriot, with being both a European and a citizen.'³³ Latin American writers frequently invoked the idea that the region's natural conditions were conducive to nurturing artists of the highest level. Furthermore, the belief that civilisation originated in the ancient world was also highly relevant to Mexicans, who considered themselves heirs to the Greco-Roman tradition and members of the Latin race in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon race. This theme will be further explored in the section on fictional narratives and the subsequent chapters.

Teaching History and Biography of Famous Men

An analysis of *La armonía* demonstrates that history was a subject of considerable significance for the Mexican Philharmonic Society (MPS). The discussion surrounding the history of music

³¹ Sarah Collins, 'The National and the Universal,' 374.

³² *Ibid.*, 376.

³³ Adelaide Machado and Júlio Rodrigues da Silva, 'Representations of the World and Alterity in the Global Daily World as Read Through the Press,' in *The Cultural Revolution of the Nineteenth Century: Theatre, the Book-Trade and Reading in the Transatlantic World*, ed. Marcia Arbeu and Ana Cláudia Suriani da Silva (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 167.

not only underscored its importance for civilised nations but also justified its inclusion in the Conservatoire's curriculum. As I have previously argued, a comprehensive examination of the journal reveals that the musical tradition projected by the MPS later evolved into the dominant discourse on the history of music, persisting into the twenty-first century.³⁴

This section is divided into two parts. The first examines the principal arguments put forward by Luis Felipe Muñoz Ledo Garro (1840–), the Society's foremost advocate of historical knowledge, in his essay *Estudios históricos*. The second considers Muñoz Ledo's biographies published in *La armonía* and their role in shaping conceptions of the artist and pedagogy.

Despite his contributions to Mexico's cultural and artistic life, Luis Muñoz Ledo has received limited scholarly attention.³⁵ He is recognised as a founding member of the *Orfeón Popular*, the author of *Estudios históricos* (published in *La armonía*), and the librettist of two zarzuelas with music by his MPS colleague Julio Ituarte—*El último pensamiento de Weber* (1869) and *Sustos y gustos* (1887). In recent years, scholars have begun to identify Muñoz Ledo as a representative of the Romantic aesthetic; however, such claims have yet to be supported by in-depth analysis or critical evaluation. Furthermore, his legacy has been obscured by frequent confusion with Dr Luis Muñoz, an older figure associated with scientific societies, highlighting the need for greater precision in biographical scholarship.³⁶

The son of Octaviano Muñoz Ledo—a statesman with an influential political career,³⁷ as reported in contemporary newspapers—Luis Felipe was a multifaceted artist, active as a writer, poet, librettist, choir director, composer, and singer. Although little information is available regarding his early life before joining the MPS in early 1866, his contributions between 1866 and

³⁴ On this point, see: the Introduction.

³⁵ For the foundation of the Orfeón Popular, see: Alba Herrera y Ogazón, *El arte musical en México*, facsimile ed. [1917] (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cenidim, 1992), 126. For a summary of Muñoz Ledo's life, see: Gabriel Pareyón, 'Muñoz Ledo, Luis Felipe,' in *Diccionario enciclopédico de la música*, vol. 2 (Mexico City: Universidad Panamericana, 2007), 707. For the reception of *El último pensamiento de Weber* and *Sustos y gustos*, see: Emilio Casco Centeno, *Julio Ituarte (1845–1905): vida y obra* (Master's thesis, Universidad Veracruzana, Xalapa, 2005), 15, 26–29. For Romantic thought in Muñoz Ledo, see: Berenice Ramírez Lago, 'Hacia una educación musical romántica: la música en las revistas literarias de la Ciudad de México (1826–1868),' in *Más allá del amor, la nostalgia, la pasión y el éxtasis... el romanticismo en México, siglo XIX*, ed. Laura Suárez de la Torre (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2020), 72–73; Ricardo Miranda, 'Coloquio del piano y del alma: ecos del romanticismo en el repertorio mexicano,' in *Más allá del amor, la nostalgia, la pasión y el éxtasis... el romanticismo en México, siglo XIX*, ed. Laura Suárez de la Torre (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2020), 221. In the works of Herrera y Ogazón and Casco Centeno, Muñoz Ledo's contributions are presented from the perspectives of Morales and Ituarte. Pareyón also notes that Muñoz Ledo studied medicine at the National School and later worked as a doctor.

³⁶ Pareyón also notes that Muñoz Ledo studied medicine at the National School and later worked as a doctor. *Ibid.*

³⁷ See: 'Luis Muñoz-Ledo Garro,' Javier Sanchiz, Víctor Gayol, and Omar Soto (coords.), *Seminario de Genealogía Mexicana*, Geneanet, 8 February 2021, online, <https://gw.geneanet.org/sanchiz?lang=en&n=munoz+ledo+garro&oc=0&p=luis>.

1867 indicate that he was a deeply committed and influential figure. His name first appeared in connection with a solemn event on 18 February 1866, where he recited a farewell poem for soprano Ángela Peralta prior to her departure for Europe.

Muñoz Ledo's contributions extended to education, where he served as one of the commissioners of the Education Board responsible for organising the Conservatoire. In May 1866, he became the institution's first professor of the History of Music and Biographies of Famous Men. He also played a key role in editorial activities as a member of *La armonía's* editorial committee, writing biographies, articles, and the supplement *Estudios históricos*. As a performer, he participated in the third private concert, singing arias by Donizetti and Verdi, and collaborated with composer Julio Ituarte to establish Mexico's first *Orfeón*.

Although details about the later years of his life remain unclear, Muñoz Ledo's contribution to the development of Romantic and historical thought in Mexico is significant for understanding the intellectual and artistic motivations behind Gustavo Campa's agenda in the late nineteenth century, a topic that will be examined in subsequent chapters.

Explaining the Relevance of Historical Thinking

Printed in 1866, *Historical Studies on Music (Estudios históricos sobre la música)* by Muñoz Ledo was one of the supplements accompanying *La armonía*. The essay was based on the notes Muñoz Ledo used for teaching the module 'History of Music and its Famous Men' at the Conservatoire of Music. In this work, Muñoz Ledo presented a universal vision, tracing the evolution of music from its origins to the Roman Empire. His primary objective was to highlight the practical benefits of studying music history as an essential component of an artist's training. Muñoz Ledo defended music history against the prevailing notion that it was a superfluous subject within music education, instead arguing that history complemented an artist's education. He maintained that understanding music's historical development provided the artist with deeper insight into the historical contexts in which music was created. Such awareness of how music was performed in different periods facilitated 'authentic interpretation,' enabling musicians to perform pieces in a manner faithful to their original style and era.³⁸

For Muñoz Ledo, comprehending the historical trajectory of music was fundamental to understanding what he termed 'the moral existence' of humankind—the biological stages in human development, from infancy to old age. He applied the same logic to art, describing infancy as a phase characterised by 'small and stammering' artistic expression, followed by

³⁸ Luis F. Muñoz Ledo, *Estudios históricos* (Mexico City: Imprenta de A. Boix, a cargo de M. Zornoza, 1866), 8.

adolescence, marked by 'robust and luxuriant' art, before ultimately reaching a stage of maturity. Although Muñoz Ledo framed this progression in a positive light, he warned of the negative consequences of artistic decline, arguing that art could become 'decrepit and weak' as a result of 'bad taste,' which 'annihilates its being.'³⁹ This analogy with biological stages reveals the influence of social Darwinism in the civilising discourse of the arts and humanities. It underscores how the logic of civilisation established growth as a universal, natural, and desirable process—whether for individuals, art forms, or even nations. Muñoz Ledo thus set the parameters of 'good taste' as a marker of a healthy and civilised society, while 'bad taste' was associated with cultural degeneration and decay.

History, as presented in *Estudios históricos*, was divided into two interdependent branches: a universal branch, which examined the evolution of all cultural expressions, and a musical branch, which focused exclusively on music. A musician studying history was expected to engage with both branches. The study of universal history—or *general* history, as Muñoz Ledo referred to it—was necessary for understanding the diverse paths taken by different societies. He argued that while human nature had remained constant, customs, behaviours, and national character were shaped by external circumstances such as climate. A musician, therefore, should not only grasp the evolution of musical techniques but also recognise the cultural and societal idiosyncrasies that shaped artistic expression. 'This concept is as precise as the fact that it is enough to simply draw attention to the nature of the compositions of each nation to immediately determine the character of the music and the genre to which it belongs.'⁴⁰ Such awareness enabled a deeper appreciation of the shifting character of humanity throughout history, as reflected in artistic expression. However, Muñoz Ledo contended that music history operated independently from general history, as music possessed a distinct moral framework reflecting different levels of civilisational development. This assertion illustrates how postcolonial Mexican intellectuals justified civilising aspirations by embracing values such as universality and high art, previously discussed.

For Muñoz Ledo, the degrees of civilisation evident in different cultures had a direct parallel in the musicians of 1866. While materialistic pursuits restricted the soul, a civilised musician was an intellectual who expanded his inner world through self-reflection and inquiry. He wrote:

Thus, the artist, a true devotee of his craft, will not limit himself to mastering the mechanical and manual aspects of his art. Rather, he will strive to scrutinise the past, to see within it all that his profession has been, all that it is, and all that it might become through study, philosophy, and intelligence. The great musicians of antiquity were also

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9–10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

poets, philosophers, and orators of the highest order, such as Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Sappho, and many others.⁴¹

Furthermore, Muñoz Ledo maintained that knowledge endowed the intellectual with the virtues necessary for meaningful engagement in society. He suggested that knowledge transformed a man into a kind, respected figure whose voice was valued by civilised society. He lamented that many highly skilled instrumentalists were overlooked, implying—though not explicitly stating—that intellectual education tempered the untamed and crude aspects of human nature, thereby fostering a more civilised society. This perspective aligns with the notion of civilisation, in which refinement, maturity, and intellectual cultivation were regarded as the highest stages of human evolution.

Throughout the introduction to *Estudios históricos*, Muñoz Ledo repeatedly distinguished between the mechanical musician and the true artist. Each represented a different archetype. The mechanical musician was a mere performer, a shallow thinker concerned only with displays of dexterity. This ‘common’ artist was portrayed as a vulgar figure, absorbed in material concerns and indifferent to intellectual or artistic elevation. In contrast, the ‘true artist’ was a noble, contemplative, and selfless individual who pursued artistic excellence for its own sake. He was an educated man who sought truth through rigorous inquiry, integrating external knowledge with his inner self and elevating himself through his art. Muñoz Ledo proclaimed ‘Science, feeling, and study form the artist! Science and inspiration make the genius!’⁴² The distinction between the ‘low’ and ‘high’ artist was a widely debated topic from the early modern period onwards, underpinning the historical division between the artisan and the artist.⁴³ In Muñoz Ledo’s case, this division was central to his vision of musical education and artistic identity.

Muñoz Ledo and the Writing of Biographies

In *Estudios Históricos*, Muñoz Ledo underscored the educational role of biography, highlighting how biographical essays depicted the lives of artists who had surmounted formidable obstacles to achieve greatness. Biography served as a source of inspiration, offering role models whose perseverance and triumph over adversity provided tangible solutions to challenges others might face. Moreover, biography functioned as a guide to excellence, chronicling an artist’s

⁴¹ ‘Así el artista, verdadero amante de su ciencia, no se limitará a la posesión de la parte mecánica y manual de su arte, sino que tratará de escudriñar el pasado y ver en él todo lo que ha sido su profesión, todo lo que es y cuánto se le puede elevar, por medio del estudio, de la filosofía, de la inteligencia. Los antiguos artistas músicos eran a la vez poetas, filósofos y oradores de primer orden, como Pitágoras, Platón, Aristóteles, Safo y otros muchos.’ Ibid., 10.

⁴² ‘¡La ciencia, el sentimiento y el estudio forman al artista! ¡La ciencia y la inspiración el genio!’ Ibid.

⁴³ See the second and fourth parts of Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2001).

experiences and studies that contributed to their mastery, thus presenting a model for aspiring individuals to emulate.⁴⁴ This perspective was deeply rooted in the Romantic ideal of the hero who defies fate, emphasizing perfectionism, curiosity, and selflessness.

Muñoz Ledo explored the notion of Romantic genius in the biographical articles he contributed to *La armonía*. Adhering to the prevailing views on the instructive value of biography, he intertwined the image of the Romantic artist with the MPS's goals to provide exemplary figures. As previously noted, the professionalisation of music was central to the MPS's mission. In the first half of the nineteenth century, music was not a recognized profession in Mexico. Young men were expected to pursue socially acceptable careers that did not include music, which was regarded as little more than a pleasant pastime. The institutionalisation of music was seen as a remedy for social and cultural shortcomings, ensuring the safeguarding of music, considered the highest of the arts, essential to civilised societies. The urgency of this effort was underscored by the MPS's argument that Mexico needed to establish a robust institution that would signal its transformation into a refined nation capable of contributing to the advancement of music, much as other civilised countries had done. In this context, biographies served to illustrate that music was a legitimate and lucrative profession, comparable to any other.

In addition to the supplement *Estudios históricos*, the inaugural issue of *La armonía* featured a biography of the Mexican pianist and composer Luis Baca Elorreaga (1824–1855), presented by Muñoz Ledo as a promising figure in Mexican art who had attained success in Paris. Tragically, his promising career was cut abruptly by his untimely death. Muñoz Ledo emphasised the obstacles Baca faced when his family pressured him into studying medicine, disregarding his musical aspirations—a fate common to many geniuses. Forced to pursue a discipline he did not desire, Muñoz Ledo recounted: 'far from his inclinations, he devoted his efforts to the study of subjects to which his heart was indisposed.'⁴⁵ For five years, Baca studied classical music in his spare time under the tutelage of José Antonio Gómez. Yet, his family persisted in steering him towards a medical career rather than music. In 1844, Baca travelled to Paris, where he spent the next three years 'away from his true calling.' As narrator, Muñoz Ledo evoked the anguish of an unfulfilled musician, burdened by his family's impositions: '[Baca] studied the preparatory subjects with diligence; but the sacrifice he imposed on himself must have been a heavy burden. At the end of that period, Baca turned to Mr. Edmundo Jouvin, a teacher at the Conservatoire of Music in Paris.'⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Muñoz Ledo, *Estudios históricos*, 9.

⁴⁵ 'ajenas a sus inclinaciones, entregándose a estudios muy distintos de aquellos a que su corazón se hallaba indispuerto'. Luis F. Muñoz Ledo, 'Baca, D. Luis,' *La armonía*, no. 1 (1 November 1866): 3.

⁴⁶ 'cursó con aplicación las materias preparatorias de esa carrera; pero el sacrificio que se imponía debía pesarle mucho, cuando al fin de este tiempo recurrió a Mr. Edmundo Jouvin'. *Ibid.*, 3–4.

Muñoz Ledo acknowledged drawing upon Marcos Arróniz's biography of Baca, included in the collection *Manual de Biografía Mejicana, o Galería de Hombres Célebres* (1857). A comparison of the two biographies reveals distinct portrayals of Baca. Muñoz Ledo depicted him as a misunderstood Romantic genius constrained by social conventions. When not playing the piano, Baca was lost in dreams of freedom. This introspective genius, as presented by Muñoz Ledo, had to struggle to break free from his metaphorical prison. In contrast, Arróniz portrayed Baca as a determined and rebellious figure who actively engaged in social and artistic life, performing in churches and salons and composing waltzes and *cuadrillas*. Notably, while Muñoz Ledo's Baca resigned himself to his fate when he travelled abroad to study medicine, Arróniz's Baca was pleased with his circumstances 'Deep inside him,' Arróniz wrote, 'Baca rejoiced in the fact that he was going to visit modern Athens and was going to become a master in his favourite subject.'⁴⁷ Muñoz Ledo's narrative strategy appealed to readers' emotions, crafting a sentimental account that likely resonated with young men who regarded music as an enjoyable pursuit rather than a viable profession.

In accordance with the agenda of the MPS, Muñoz Ledo underscored the benefits of systematic education in Baca and the articles of the Mexican composer Joaquín Beristain (c. 1817–1839). The biography of Luis Baca focused on illustrating how the young composer matured into a true artist and how Parisian society recognised his genius. Baca had benefited from the rigorous training he received at the Paris Conservatoire, which provided him with the appropriate education to compose music that resonated with Parisian audiences. Muñoz Ledo emphasised that Parisians accepted Baca as an equal precisely because of the education and refined manners he had acquired at an institutionalised school such as the conservatoire.

Muñoz Ledo contrasted this success with the case of Joaquín Beristain, another composer who had died at a young age but who, unlike Baca, suffered the 'tragic' consequences of a limited education due to the absence of institutional support. Muñoz Ledo depicted Beristain as an intelligent and inquisitive man capable of self-instruction. However, the lack of formal training resulted in his compositions being 'imperfect'.

Surrendered to his own inspiration, without a theatre in which to broaden his horizons, with an imperfect education in the science of music that only made matters worse; [Beristain] understood that he had to compensate with his talent and innate acuity for the rules and precepts that no one had taught him and which he could not emulate from others.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ 'en su interior se regocijaba que iba a visitar la moderna Atenas y perfeccionarse allí en su estudio favorito de la música.' Marcos Arróniz, *Manual de biografía mejicana, o galería de hombres célebres* (Paris: Librería de Rosa, Bouret y Cía, 1857), 58.

⁴⁸ 'Entregado a sus propias inspiraciones, sin un teatro en que ensanchar el horizonte de sus conocimientos y lo que es peor, con una educación, más que imperfecta, en la ciencia musical, se veía

Beristain wished for better prospects for future generations and, in 1838, founded an academy of vocal and instrumental music to support young musicians.

The biography of Beristain had a political dimension that extended beyond merely honouring his legacy. The academy of music to which Muñoz Ledo referred was the very institution that the MPS later absorbed to establish its conservatoire, following a line of succession that excluded other musicians who had sought to institutionalise music in Mexico. It is worth noting that multiple musical academies emerged following Mexico's independence. Beristain, alongside Agustín Caballero—the first director of the MPS's Conservatoire—founded the academy in 1838. Caballero subsequently closed it in 1839, only to reopen the school of music in 1864.

Biographies and the Institutionalisation of Music

Beyond their commemorative function, Muñoz Ledo's biographies also engaged with contemporary debates on the institutionalisation of music in Mexico. Placing these narratives in dialogue with other sources, such as newspapers and public controversies, reveals how biography could serve as a rhetorical tool to legitimise the MPS's educational project. Newspapers from 1864 and July 1866 document discussions regarding the unsuccessful institutionalisation of music. A recurrent argument was that efforts to establish public music schools were hindered, in part, by divisions among local composers, ultimately limiting their impact on the country's musical life. In 1864, José González de la Torre argued that most musical academies had failed because Mexico's leading musicians were divided rather than united in their efforts. For González, the Academy of Music directed by Agustín Caballero and Joaquín Beristain was the only school that had provided a 'proper' musical education.⁴⁹ His comments were a response to the contemporary situation, in which Caballero had reopened the academy. The MPS had absorbed the academy and appointed Caballero as director of its Conservatoire on 1 July 1866.

The inauguration of the Conservatoire drew criticism from musicians who objected to the institution's name. A group of *dilettanti* (as they referred to themselves) published a letter in the newspaper *La sombra* on 13 July 1866.⁵⁰ Among other arguments, the letter stated that a conservatoire should bring together the nation's finest composers. The signatories contended that Mexico had superior composers to those affiliated with the MPS. Notably, the letter listed

en la precisión de suplir con su talento, con su natural penetración, aquellas reglas y varios preceptos, que nadie le comunicó, ni de nadie pudo imitar.' Muñoz Ledo, 'Beristain (D. Joaquín),' *La armonía*, no. 2 (1 December 1866): 22.

⁴⁹ José González de la Torre, 'La música en México,' *La sociedad*, 29 September 1864, 2.

⁵⁰ Unos suscriptores aficionados a la música, 'Remitido,' *La sombra*, 13 July 1866, 4.

several musicians, including José Antonio Gómez, Cenobio Paniagua, Antonio Valle, Eusebio Delgado, Luis G. Morán, Antonio Aduna, Jesús Medinilla, and José Briseño, all of whom were highly skilled instrumentalists with expertise in harmony, counterpoint, composition, and orchestration. While the dilettanti explicitly questioned the pedagogical capabilities of four musicians within the MPS, they expressed high regard for the institution's other leading figures. It is possible that this criticism prompted the MPS to intensify its efforts to promote its mission and objectives, culminating in the founding of *La armonía*.

Furthermore, the letter published in *La sombra* proclaimed José Antonio Gómez (1805–1876) as ‘the dean of Mexican musicians,’ a distinguished composer, pianist, and organist with profound knowledge of counterpoint, as demonstrated in 1854 when he was poised to become the first director of the conservatoire that was to be established that year.⁵¹ Gómez was no stranger to the MPS. Muñoz Ledo had acknowledged him as Baca's teacher, and Caballero had mentioned him in his inaugural address, recognising him as a leading advocate for music education in Mexico. Nevertheless, it is possible that Gómez, who at the time resided outside Mexico City, was excluded from the tradition that the MPS sought to establish. As an ecclesiastical figure who had served as organist and chapel master at the Cathedral of Mexico City, he may have embodied a tradition from which the MPS wished to distance itself.

The secularisation of education was another defining feature of systematic training. The MPS had expressed its mission to replace practical and routine-based instruction with a modern educational system. Since the evangelisation of Mexico began in 1511, the Church had overseen the education and careers of its musicians. Muñoz Ledo omitted from Baca's biography the fact that, like many other musicians, he had been trained by Church-affiliated musicians such as Vicente Guardado, chapel master of Durango Cathedral, and Gómez, his counterpart in Mexico City. Arróniz, whose biography Muñoz Ledo used as a basis for his article, had included this information. However, Muñoz Ledo merely referred to Gómez in a tone of respect and admiration:

He had the fortune of receiving his initiation through the illustrious guidance of the most distinguished maestro, D. J. A. Gómez. A career undertaken under such auspicious beginnings, led in its early steps by a master like Sr. Gómez, in whom wisdom is coupled with prudence and the most effective method, could lead only to the most complete and satisfying success.⁵²

⁵¹ Musicologist John Lazos has studied widely José Antonio Gómez's musical career.

⁵² ‘tuvo la fortuna de recibir la iniciación por el ilustre conducto del notabilísimo maestro D. J. A. Gómez. Una carrera emprendida tan lisonjeros auspicios, dirigida en sus primeros pasos por un maestro como el Sr. Gómez, en quien el saber, se reúne la prudencia y el método más acertado, no podía conducir, sino al éxito más completo y satisfactorio.’ Luis F. Muñoz Ledo, ‘Baca, D. Luis,’ *La armonía*, no. 1 (1 November 1866): 4’

It is significant that Muñoz Ledo omitted Gómez's high ecclesiastical position, which he held until 1865 when he relocated to Tulancingo. It is also plausible that Muñoz Ledo avoided this association for rhetorical purposes, instead framing the narrative around a man guided by his genius.

Muñoz Ledo also examined the secularisation of education in his biography of Boieldieu, in which he criticised the Church's pedagogical methods. He described how the young Boieldieu began his musical training as a chorister at Rouen Cathedral because his father could not afford superior tuition. There, he was placed in a menial position under an irascible old priest named Broche, who was 'obsessed with his decaying concerns and believed that science should be learned through rigorous and harsh methods.'⁵³

Indeed, what beneficial outcome for science can result from forcing a child, whose soul should be ennobled, to perform domestic and servile duties? Certainly none; yet this did not prevent Broche, Boieldieu's master, from compelling him to carry out the duties of a chamber servant, instilling such fear in him through his harsh treatment that one day, upon spilling a drop of ink on his master's papers, his terror was so great that, seeing no means of escaping the punishment he expected, he resorted to flight, walking alone to Paris, where his family took him in. Back with his family, he resumed his studies, and Broche agreed to adopt a less severe approach in his lessons.'⁵⁴

Muñoz Ledo translated and adapted the biography written by the Belgian music critic François-Joseph Fétis (1784–1871). A comparison of both articles reveals that the Mexican writer modified the original source for rhetorical purposes. Fétis recounted the episode in a more descriptive manner:

Harsh towards his students, as was the case with almost all church music teachers of the past, Broche was particularly severe with young Boiel (as Boieldieu was called in his youth), perhaps due to his promising talent. Musicians of Broche's temperament believed at the time that a rigorous musical education was inseparable from harsh treatment. It is said that Boieldieu was forced to serve his relentless master as a valet, much like Haydn had done for the old Porpora. It is also said that such was the fear this fierce pedagogue instilled in him that one day, terrified by an ink stain he had accidentally made in one of his master's books, he saw no other way to escape the impending punishment than to flee. He set off alone, on foot, and made his way to Paris. After being reunited with his family, he resumed his studies, and Broche eventually agreed to temper the severity of his lessons.'⁵⁵

⁵³ 'imbuido en las rancias preocupaciones, que quieren que toda ciencia se posea a fuerza de rigores y durezas'. Luis F. Muñoz Ledo, 'Boieldieu (Francisco Adriano),' *La armonía*, no. 12 (15 April 1867): 90.

⁵⁴ 'En efecto, ¿a qué resultado feliz para la ciencia puede conducir el hacer servir en las ocupaciones domésticas y serviles, al niño en quien se debe cuidar de ennoblecer el alma? Ciertamente que a ninguno; pero esto no impedía a Broche, maestro de Boieldieu, obligarlo a hacer los oficios de camarista, infundiéndole tal miedo con sus ásperos tratamientos, que un día, habiendo caído una gota de tinta en los papeles de su amo-maestro, fue su terror tan grande, que no hallando ningún medio de sustraerse a los castigos a que su falta lo exponía, apeló a la fuga, marchando solo y a pie hasta París en donde su familia lo recogió. De regreso con su familia, reanudó el curso de sus estudios, y Broche consintió en usar menos severidad en sus lecciones.' Ibid.

⁵⁵ 'Dur envers ses élèves, comme l'étaient autrefois presque tous les maitres de musique d'église, Broche montrait plus de sévérité pour le petit Boiel (c'est ainsi qu'on appelait Boieldieu dans sa jeunesse) que

Muñoz Ledo used the character of the old teacher to illustrate the harmful effects of an authoritarian and punishing educational approach, recreating the moment that prompted the boy's escape. Muñoz Ledo celebrated the fact that Boieldieu retained his passion for music despite the mistreatment; however, he acknowledged that this was not always the case. Muñoz Ledo questioned how a servile position could contribute to scientific knowledge if the teacher failed to nurture the child's development. This argument was underscored by rhetorical questions. For Muñoz Ledo, a teacher in a modern education system should serve as a protective guide, treating children with respect and dignity.

Muñoz Ledo depicted the qualities of an ideal, benevolent teacher through the case of Fray Arnaldo de Basaac. In his biography, Basaac was a French missionary who introduced indigenous people to the art of music following the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Despite not speaking native languages, Basaac was able to transmit his knowledge due to his kind temperament, which Muñoz Ledo described as possessing 'the enthusiastic soul of an artist and the evangelical patience of a priest.'⁵⁶ Later, Basaac established a music school where he taught indigenous children to sing 'This first modest school of music became the nucleus where the principles of art were cultivated. In this way, it could expand and win people's hearts.'⁵⁷ Thanks to the success of his mission, Basaac later founded an instrument-making workshop, which contributed to the creation of orchestras.

Muñoz Ledo portrayed Basaac as a man who had made significant contributions to the civilisation of Mexico. However, Basaac belonged to the early sixteenth-century. If Muñoz Ledo had any opinions on his contemporaries, he expressed them only sparingly. As we have seen, he held Gómez in high regard, praising him for his 'prudence and righteous method.'⁵⁸ Gómez had guided Baca, and his teaching had produced 'successful results.' Beristain, in turn, was presented as an exemplary model for other teachers. Muñoz Ledo concluded:

pour tous les autres, peut-être à cause de ses heureuses dispositions ; car les hommes de la trempe de cet organiste se persuadaient alors qu'une bonne éducation musicale est inséparable des mauvais traitements. On dit que Boieldieu était obligé de remplir auprès de son impitoyable maître l'office de valet de chambres comme autrefois Haydn avec le vieux Porpora. On dit aussi que telle était l'épouvante que lui inspirait ce pédagogue farouche, qu'un jour, frappé de terreur à la vue d'une tache d'encre qu'il avait faite sur un livre du maître, il ne crut pouvoir se soustraire au danger qui le menaçait que par la fuite, qu'il partit seul, à pied, et qu'il se rendit à Paris. Rendu à sa famille, il reprit le cours de ses études, et Broche consentit à mettre moins de sévérité ses leçons.' François-Joseph Fétis, 'Boieldieu (François-Adrien),' in *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, vol. 1 (Brussels: Meline, Cans et Compagnie, 1837), 24–25.

⁵⁶ 'alma entusiasta del artista y paciencia evangélica del sacerdote'. Luis F. Muñoz Ledo, 'Basaac (Fr. Arnaldo de),' *La armonía*, no. 2 (15 November 1866): 11–12.

⁵⁷ 'Esta pequeña escuela, el plantel primero de la música, vino a ser el núcleo en donde se concentraron los principios del arte para ir después a ganar los corazones de los demás.' *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁸ 'prudencia y el método más acertado' Luis F. Muñoz Ledo, 'Baca, D. Luis,' *La armonía*, no. 1 (1 November 1866): 4.

Our motherland needs teachers like him—those who stand out beyond their artistic circles: faithful, enthusiastic, and generous men, whose only ambition is the glory of their homeland, leaving behind shameful rivalries to cooperate with their knowledge and efforts for the success of such a magnificent project.⁵⁹

The MPS was in the process of establishing a secular tradition. They acknowledged figures from the church, such as Gómez, without explicitly mentioning their ecclesiastical careers.

By situating the lives of musicians such as Baca, Beristain, and Boieldieu within broader debates on institutionalisation and secularisation, Muñoz Ledo's biographies transcended mere commemoration. They became instruments of persuasion, aligning individual life stories with the MPS's agenda to legitimise music as both a profession and a civilising force.

The Relationship Between Music and Literature

La armonía accompanied its biographical section with fictional narratives centred on renowned composers and artists. This section examines three tales written by members of the MPS: Aniceto Ortega, Manuel María Ortíz de Montellanos and Luis Muñoz Ledo. The analysis reveals that these short stories embody key Romantic ideals, including the concept of genius, the purpose of the true artist, the virtue of sacrifice, the power of an exceptional human voice, and the redemptive force of true love. It is argued that these narratives were written in a style reminiscent of the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, serving as fictional complements to the biographical articles written by Muñoz Ledo.

Katharine Ellis has demonstrated how Maurice Schlesinger (1798-1871), editor of the *Gazette*, actively promoted Romanticism through the creation of fictional biographies in the style of E. T. A. Hoffmann, primarily for publicity purposes. Schlesinger's narratives employed 'novelistic tropes' centred on 'philistinism, madness, and death in artistic ecstasy.'⁶⁰ Prominent writers such as Honoré de Balzac, George Sand, Jules Janin, Hector Berlioz, and Richard Wagner similarly reconstructed characters, dialogues, and scenarios involving famous musicians, relying more on imaginative embellishment than historical accuracy.⁶¹ Additionally, Schlesinger published a series of *récits romances* in which episodes from the lives of composers such as Dufay, Josquin, Corelli, and Stradella were given novelistic treatment in the manner of

⁵⁹ 'Muchos profesores como éste necesita nuestra patria para levantarse de su ambiente artístico; hombres llenos de fe, entusiastas, indulgentes entre sí, y que sin más ambición que el engrandecimiento del suelo natal, y olvidándose de vergonzosas rivalidades cooperen con su ilustración y sus labores al éxito de tan grandioso objeto.' Muñoz Ledo, 'Beristain...', *La armonía*, no. 3, 23.

⁶⁰ Katharine Ellis, 'The Uses of Fiction: Contes and nouvelles in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 1834–1844,' *Revue de musicologie* 90, no. 2 (2004): 254–55.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 253.

Hoffmann's fictional *Kapellmeister* Johannes Kreisler.⁶² According to Ellis, Schlesinger's project established a dynamic interplay between fiction, music criticism, and music history, situating them in 'an explicitly reciprocal relationship'.⁶³

The significance of the *Gazette* within the Mexican musical press should not be underestimated. As Ellis further argues, Schlesinger's aim was not *l'art pour l'art* but the cultural function of storytelling as a form of public education, bringing together music and literature in practice as well as in the theory. Such symbiosis between literature and music was central to Parisian criticism of the period, and a similar rationale underpinned the Mexican case.

The stories published in *La armonía* merged the hoffmanesque aesthetic described by Ellis with a distinctly moralistic tone. Sergio Armando Hernández Roura has demonstrated that German culture remained largely foreign to Mexican readers due to centuries of censorship during the colony. It was only in the nineteenth century that German literature—along with Hoffmann's works—began to permeate Mexican literary culture. During the early nineteenth century, Mexican audiences largely rejected the supernatural elements characteristic of German literature, contending that the Mexican 'meridional sensibility' was unsuited to such fantastical themes.⁶⁴ Similarly, they resisted Romantic elements that lacked moral grounding, including grotesque imagery, fear, madness, irrationality, suicide, terror, and scenes of brutality, which were fundamental to Hoffmann's fantastic stories and German literary traditions. Instead, Mexican readers favoured works that upheld strong moral principles.⁶⁵ Over time, Hoffmann's narratives gradually integrated into Mexican literary culture, though with adaptations. Translations often modified the German cultural framework, and in some cases, explanatory footnotes contextualized cultural differences. Certain enigmatic passages were even omitted to align with the prevailing literary sensibilities of Mexican audiences.⁶⁶

Mozart, the *petit sortier* in *La armonía* and *Les Musées des familles*: the Artist Genius and its Role in Society

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart occupied a significant position in *La armonía*'s imaginary, where he was portrayed as an essential figure within the Austro-German classical canon alongside Haydn, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn. Although he was referenced in various contexts throughout the newspaper, the editors particularly emphasized the image of the child prodigy. Mozart was

⁶² Ibid., 255–56.

⁶³ Ibid., 256.

⁶⁴ Sergio Armando Hernández Roura, 'Traducción y circulación de las obras de Hoffmann en México (1840–1910),' *Tropelías: Revista de teoría literaria y literatura comparada* 32 (2019): 135.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 137.

depicted as a ‘little sorcerer,’ an innocent and sweet child with a rare talent that enchanted his listeners. Furthermore, symbols of genius and the archetype of the transcendental artist, devoted to his craft, were closely associated with his persona.⁶⁷ The two texts examined in this section underscore the Romantic notion of justice in which history ultimately vindicated the child who was once admired by aristocrats but never fully accepted as their equal. This analysis compares two works on Mozart. First, a fictional story by physician, researcher, pianist, composer, and writer Aniceto Ortega (1825-1875), and a biographical essay by the French critic Paul Scudo (1806-1864), introduced by Pitre-Chevalier, *nom de plum* of Pierre-Michel-François Chevalier (1812-1863) and published in *Les Musées des familles* in 1852.⁶⁸ The three authors explore the irony of fate through the relationship between Mozart and the young Marie Antoinette.

Ortega’s short story, ‘The Artist and the Queen,’ centres on the childhood friendship between Mozart and Marie Antoinette at the Viennese court. This narrative, widely known in the nineteenth century, illustrated the young Mozart’s innocence and his unawareness of his servile position. Writers of the period frequently contrasted Mozart’s lowly status as an artist during the *Ancien Régime* with the prestige he attained posthumously, interpreting this shift as an example of destiny’s irony. Ortega’s story, published in the ‘Varieties’ section of *La armonía*, serves as a moral reflection on the unpredictability of life and the fate of a musical genius. However, unlike the following Romantic stories discussed below, it deliberately avoids the tropes of the suffering artist who sacrifices everything for his art. Instead, Ortega emphasizes the contrast between Mozart’s low position and his eventual artistic recognition.

Ortega highlights Mozart’s subordinate position within the courtly hierarchy. At the beginning of the story, he describes Mozart as a boy of ‘dark origins’ who played among the royal children, including Marie Antoinette. The young princess is portrayed as a capricious child, accustomed to giving orders. Despite their different social standings, the two children formed a close bond due to their similar ages. Marie Antoinette enjoyed pretending to be a queen, and in their play, she adorned Mozart with a paper crown and a wooden sceptre, imagining themselves as rulers. The decisive moment in the story occurs when the Austrian Emperor, impressed by Mozart’s musical talent, offers him a reward of his choosing. In his childlike innocence, Mozart expresses his highest admiration by pointing to Marie Antoinette, wishing to marry her ‘The child, with a simplicity and candour truly infantile, pointed to the princess as that which he valued

⁶⁷ Mark Everist, *Mozart’s Ghosts: Haunting the Halls of Musical Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁶⁸ *La armonía* classified the article under its ‘Biographical Section’ (Partes biográficas), distinguishing it from the more general ‘Biographies’ (Biografías) section previously examined

most highly of all he knew.’⁶⁹ His declaration is received with laughter from the imperial family, including the princess herself, who ridicules the young musician. The narrator adopts a tone of pity, emphasizing that Mozart’s proposal was dismissed because Marie Antoinette was destined to marry a ruler, not an artist.

Ortega underscores the irony of Marie Antoinette’s choice through the contrasting fates of the two figures. First, the narrator directly addresses the princess, lamenting her rejection of Mozart ‘Poor child! If you knew the terrible fate that awaits you in your royal career, you would not laugh at that heart which, from its first and innocent throbs, seeks to devote itself to making you happy, and can truly do so.’⁷⁰ The story further contrasts their reversed positions in history. While Mozart eventually achieved artistic greatness and married a ‘kind and tender partner,’ Marie Antoinette faced a tragic downfall. The narrative concludes with a symbolic legend in which flowers miraculously bloom at the site of Mozart’s bust in Germany, while Marie Antoinette’s separated head serves as a grim reminder of her fate. The final moral statement makes the story’s didactic purpose explicit: ‘Poor Mary! It would have been better for you to have been the happy consort of the lauded artist, than an unfortunate wife, mother, and queen!’⁷¹

The moral of the story is categorical: choosing power over genius ultimately leads to misfortune. Ortega’s story was written for a female readership, serving as a cautionary reflection that urges women to recognize the value of artistic talent and emotional sincerity over ambition and political status. Beyond its moral message, the narrative presents a compelling contrast between the old and new regimes. Published in Mexico City during a period when both Mexico and France had reinstated monarchist systems, the story reflects the broader sociopolitical climate of its time. Emperor Maximilian’s revival of aristocratic titles further underscores this historical context. Given that Ortega himself was a descendant of an aristocratic lineage,⁷² it is possible that his portrayal of this episode also functioned as a political statement on the restoration of monarchy and aristocratic privileges. Additionally, the narrative introduces an alternative interpretation that redefines true royalty, suggesting that nobility is not determined by

⁶⁹ ‘el niño con una sencillez y candor verdaderamente infantiles, señaló a la princesa como lo que él apreciaba de más valer en cuanto conocía.’ Aniceto Ortega, ‘El artista y la reina,’ *La armonía*, no. 5 (1 January 1867): 37.

⁷⁰ ‘¡Pobre niña! Si supieras el terrible destino que te espera en tu carrera regia no te reirías de aquel corazón que desde sus primeros e inocentes latidos quiere consagrarse a hacerte feliz, y puede verdaderamente hacerlo.’ Ibid.

⁷¹ ¡Pobre María! Más te valiera haber sido la dichosa consorte del artista laureado, que esposa, madre y reina infortunada! Ibid.

⁷² For a presentation of Aniceto Ortega’s nobility, see: Berenice Ramírez Lago, *Aniceto Ortega (1825–1875): obra para piano* (Master’s thesis, Universidad Veracruzana, Xalapa, July 2018), 24–29. For a discussion of noble families in Mexico in the first half of the nineteenth century, see: Verónica Zárate Toscano, *Los nobles ante la muerte en México: actitudes, ceremonias y memoria, 1750–1850* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Históricos; Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2005), 94–10.

aristocratic lineage but rather by individual genius, which finds its rightful place in the new social order. In this sense, the story conveys a meritocratic ideal in which the artist's success is depicted as the result of dedication and hard work, rather than inherited status.

This section contrasts the authors' stories of the relationship between Mozart and Marie Antoinette while also examining the translation changes introduced in *La armonía*. Paul Scudo's article originally appeared in his essay collection *Critique et littérature musicales*, published in Paris in 1850. In March 1852, *Les Musées des familles*⁷³ republished a part of this chapter under the section 'La musique et les maîtres allemands,' with the subtitle 'Wolfgang Mozart et Marie-Antoinette'. This article reproduced part of Scudo's work. Among the interventions, Chevalier summarised information contained in paragraphs to save space, and, at the same time, added comments that connected with the alternate narrative that opened and closed the article. Chevalier constructs a narrative centred on the Romantic concept of fate that intertwines Mozart's relationship with Marie Antoinette and the tragic, enigmatic history of the Requiem. With these aspects, Chevalier depicts a deep connection between two individuals despite the external circumstances that separate them.

In contrast to Ortega's portrayal of Marie Antoinette as an arrogant child, Chevalier characterizes her as a compassionate and virtuous young woman. She is depicted as opening the doors of Limburg Cathedral to a small, distressed stranger weeping at the entrance. The child, upon encountering the cathedral's organ, instinctively plays a melody from the Requiem that has been echoing in his mind. Astonished, Marie Antoinette inquires about his identity, to which he responds that his name is Wolfgang Mozart. However, when he asks for her name, she remains mysterious, replying enigmatically 'You shall know my name hereafter, and I shall not forget yours.'⁷⁴ A pivotal moment in the narrative occurs at the end when an unidentified messenger delivers an anonymous letter to Mozart, commissioning a Requiem Mass. In Chevalier's adaptation of events, it is Mozart's wife who eventually discloses the commissioner's identity. According to this version, the request originated from Marie Antoinette—who is revealed to be the same pilgrim Mozart encountered at Limburg Cathedral

⁷³ For the success of *Les musées des familles* in Spain and Mexico, see: Raquel Pérez Valle, 'Primeras publicaciones ilustradas en el Viejo Mundo y del Nuevo Mundo: más allá del Musée des Familles,' *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos, Débats*, 29 March 2021, accessed on 20 May 2021, <http://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/84203>; Marie-Laure Aurenche, 'Londres-Paris-Mexico ou la naissance de la presse périodique illustré (1830–1850),' in *Impressions du Mexique et de France/Impresiones de México y de Francia*, ed. Lise Andries and Laura Suárez de la Torre (Paris and Mexico: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme; Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2009), 190–218.

⁷⁴ 'Vous saurez mon nom plus tard, et je n'oublierai pas le vôtre.' Pitre-Chevalier, 'La musique et les maîtres allemands. Wolfrang Mozart et Marie-Antoinette,' *Les Musées des familles* 19, no. 21 (March 1852): 162.

and the very archduchess who once kissed him. Chevalier underscores the tragic irony of this revelation

Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, who, stricken with mournful thoughts, glimpsed the blade of the guillotine... [/] Why did the artist not know whence this homage came to him? And why did the queen remain ignorant of the fatal outcome of her incognito? [/] God willed to leave an impenetrable mystery upon the strange connection of these two destinies: Wolfgang Mozart and Marie Antoinette?'⁷⁵

Paul Scudo's biography presents a different account of the encounter between Mozart and Marie Antoinette. According to Scudo, the Mozart family was invited into the private chambers of Empress Marie-Thérèse, who seated the young Mozart on her lap. The interaction between Mozart and Marie Antoinette occurs after the boy falls to the floor and is helped up by the humble and compassionate young girl. In response to her kindness, Mozart expresses his wish to marry her. Surprised, the empress inquires about the reasons behind his proposal, to which Mozart replies 'Gratitude,' he replied; 'she has been so good to me, whilst her sisters regarded me without moving.'⁷⁶ In response, Marie Antoinette kisses Mozart and smiles at him with a charming expression. In reference to this episode between the two children, Scudo includes a remark that encapsulates his perspective on childhood: 'The virgin soul of a child of genius is a deep spring, nourished by all first impressions, and whence spring those charming creatures that populate the world of fantasy.'⁷⁷

The portrayal of Mozart as a naturally gifted and innocent child in the works of Scudo and Chevalier aligns with the image of childhood promoted by the MPS as part of its educational agenda. Their depiction contrasts with the tormented and unsupported childhood described in the biographies by Beristain and Boieldieu, as presented by Muñoz Ledo. Within the framework of the MPS, Mozart's artistic development is attributed not only to the proper guidance of his father and teacher, Leopold Mozart, but also to the nurturing influence of a compassionate female figure. This emphasis on female tenderness echoes the role of women as described by the President of the MPS, Manuel Siliceo, in his address during the Philharmonic Society's inauguration in November 1866. In this speech, Siliceo acknowledged the significant contributions of women to society, particularly their role in providing emotional support to their children and husbands.

⁷⁵ 'à Marie-Antoinette, reine de France, qui, frappée d'idées funèbres, entrevoyait le couperet de la guillotine... [/] Pourquoi l'artiste ne sut-il [sic] pas d'où lui venait cet hommage? et pourquoi la reine ignore-t-elle le fatal résultat de son incognito? [/] Dieu voulait-laisser un mystère impénétrable sur l'étrange rapport de ces deux destinées : Wolfrang Mozart et Marie-Antoinette?' Ibid., 164.

⁷⁶ 'De la reconnaissance, répondit-il; elle a été si bonne pour moi, tandis que ses sœurs me regardaient sans bouger.' Ibid., 163.

⁷⁷ 'L'âme vierge d'un enfant de génie est une source profonde qui s'alimente de toutes les impressions premières et d'où naissent ces créatures charmantes qui peuplent le monde de la fantasia.' Ibid.

The editorial differences between the versions of the article published in *La armonía* and *Les Musées des familles* reflect both visual and textual adaptations shaped by the distinct contexts of each publication. As an illustrated magazine, *Les Musées* included two images that enhanced the article's presentation: an illustration of Limburg Cathedral by E. Breton, aligning with Chevalier's introductory anecdote about Mozart and Marie Antoinette's first meeting, and a portrait of the adult Mozart by Coppin. In contrast, *La armonía*, which was not an illustrated publication, omitted these visual elements. Beyond these structural differences, the Mexican adaptation of the text also involved significant modifications to its content. The translator removed passages where Scudo digressed from Mozart's story, such as a reference to the father of the philosopher Pascal, which was deemed irrelevant. Furthermore, sections discussing the romantic experiences of Dante and Goethe were condensed to emphasise the profound impact of emotions on young geniuses. Finally, an advertisement for Scudo's book, included in the concluding paragraph of the original publication, was omitted in the *La armonía* version. These editorial choices highlight the contextual shifts in audience expectations and publication formats that influenced the article's presentation in different cultural and linguistic settings.

Stradella by Montellanos: The Power of the Vocal Music in Society

Manuel María Ortiz de Montellanos (–), a literary member of the MPS and formerly secretary to Manuel Siliceo during his tenure as Minister of Public Instruction, contributed to *La armonía* with fictional narratives.⁷⁸ His tale '*Hortensia y Stradella*' illustrates the power attributed to vocal music in society, revealing the MPS advocacy for the superiority of vocal music over instrumental music. In this narrative, Montellanos transformed Alessandro Stradella—a little-known figure in the nineteenth century—into an idealised Romantic character whose story exemplified the MPS's cultural and aesthetic ideals.

Following Ortega's tale on Mozart, *La armonía* published Montellanos's account of the seventeenth-century Italian composer and singer Stradella, whose biography is interwoven with themes of passion, artistic genius, and divine inspiration. His story follows Stradella's love affair with his pupil Hortensia Petrucci, a noblewoman betrothed to Duke Gaetano Sforzato. Defying social conventions, the lovers escape, inciting the Duke's anger and prompting him to send assassins in pursuit. While hiding in Rome, Stradella performs an oratorio at the Church of Saint John Lateran, where his transcendent singing moves the employed assassins to abandon their

⁷⁸ Maximiliano, 'Parte oficial (Otro, nombrando Subsecretario de Instrucción Pública y Cultos al Sr. Ortiz de Montellanos),' *El diario del imperio*, 18 May 1865, 469. Very little is known about Montellano's biography.

mission. Ultimately, however, the lovers cannot escape their fate, as Sforzato takes his revenge by murdering them on their wedding night in Genoa.

Stradella's story was widely known among nineteenth century musical enthusiasts. Musicologist Sarah Hibberd has studied the nineteenth century reception of Stradella that was shaped by the Romantic era's fascination with his life and legend. Hibberd explores this revival, noting that interest in Stradella was reignited in Paris following a performance at Fétis's *concerts historiques* in 1833. While the music itself was well received, its appeal was largely intertwined with the mythologized accounts of Stradella's life. The legend of Stradella was subsequently reinterpreted in Jules Janin's 1836 *récit* 'Stradella ou le poète et le musicien' for the *Revue et Gazette Musicale*, and further adapted in two theatrical works in 1837, a *comédie-vaudeville* with music by Friedrich Flotow and a grand opera by Louis Niedermeyer. The diversity of these adaptations highlights the complex and often contradictory historical consciousness of July Monarchy Paris, as well as the various strategies employed to modernise historical narratives for contemporary audiences. Hibberd argues that during this period, artistic imagination often supplanted historical accuracy, with creators emphasizing Stradella's biography over his musical contributions in order to make the past more accessible. But most important, 'they "rediscovered" Stradella's biography and focused on the musician rather than his music.'⁷⁹

Montellanos portrays Stradella as a divinely inspired genius whose voice possesses a transformative power capable of bridging the human and the divine. His singing captivates listeners, transports them to a sublime realm, and even subdues a group of assassins. The narrator describes an episode in which Stradella, deeply immersed in his art, sings under the moonlight, entrancing Hortensia and bystanders alike:

Endowed by God with the most beautiful voice that has ever emerged from a man's throat, with a passionate heart and inspired by the twin arts: music and poetry; [Stradella] chanted his love beside his beloved one under the moonlight in Venice, as birds sing. He expressed his feelings as angels would, and he infiltrated the heart of that blond girl who looked at him with a rapt expression, the same way light infiltrates through diamonds to reflect the colour of the iris.⁸⁰

Stradella's voice is not merely an aesthetic pleasure but a medium that reconciles humanity with the divine. The narrator suggests that listeners recall the lost paradise when hearing Stradella's singing, with his voice serving as a conduit through which mortals can communicate

⁷⁹ Sarah Hibberd, 'Murder in the Cathedral? Stradella, Musical Power, and Performing the Past in 1830s Paris,' *Music & Letters* 87, no. 4 (November 2006): 578.

⁸⁰ 'Dotado por Dios de la voz más hermosa que ha salido de la garganta de un hombre, de un corazón ardiente y apasionado y de la inspiración gemela del músico y del poeta, al lado de su amada sobre los lagos de Venecia, a la luz de la luna, cantaba su amor como lo cantan las aves, lo expresaba como deben expresarlo los ángeles, y lo infiltraba en el corazón de aquella rubia niña que lo miraba absorta y embebecida, como se filtra la luz en los diamantes para reflejar los colores del iris.' Manuel O. Montellanos, 'Hortensia y Stradella,' *La armonía*, no. 12 (15 April 1867): 94.

with God. This divine power is further emphasized in the central church scene, where Stradella, fully immersed in his performance, prays for himself and his enemies. Despite their inability to understand Latin, the assassins comprehend the music's spiritual meaning, leading to their surrender:

and those holy words, spoken in an incomprehensible language to the bravos, were revealed to them thanks to the singer's intonation: the omnipotent power of genius and music first ruffled their hair, moved their hearts, and caused their bodies to shiver; then they bent their knees, opened their hands that held the knives, and tears wept from their eyes [...] when the singer turned around, he found the assassins crying and gazing at him, with an expression of captivation and adoration in their eyes.⁸¹

Montellanos' portrayal of Stradella aligns with Romantic ideals of the artist as a genius, combining the talents of composer, poet, and performer. Unlike Ortega's fictionalisation of Mozart, which presented the artist as a divinely chosen figure destined to eventual recognition through providential justice, Stradella's genius lies in his voice—a spiritual and transformative force that redeems even hired assassins. Yet his tragic end also casts him as a martyr of love, reinforcing the Romantic notion that artistic greatness is inseparable from sacrifice.

Stradella's compulsion to sing is depicted as an uncontrollable force, even in the face of danger. The narrator comments on his inability to suppress his 'canto puro (*pure singing*)' during his church performance: 'Why does the nightingale not drown his song when the hunter stalks him? Why does he not turn off the light of his firefly's wings when a dangerous hand hunts him?'⁸² The comparison of Stradella to a nightingale aligns with Romantic symbolism, reinforcing his role as an artist whose expression is both natural and inevitable. By prioritizing Stradella's vocal qualities over his compositions, Montellanos reinforces the heroic dimensions of his protagonist, positioning him as a figure whose artistry transcends historical fact and enters the realm of myth.

Montellanos blurs the line between fiction and historical reality. While the narrator initially claims to recount a 'true' story, the text eventually acknowledges the historical context surrounding Stradella's music. Montellanos informs readers that the oratorio *Stradella* performed at Saint John Lateran was traditionally attributed to him, with the original score housed in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice and a copy preserved at the Paris Conservatoire. Furthermore, Montellanos references Friedrich von Flotow's opera *Stradella*, suggesting an

⁸¹ 'y esas palabras santas, en lenguaje que los *bravos* no comprendían, comprendieronlas por el acento del cantor, porque el poder omnipotente del genio y de la música, erizó primero sus cabellos; conmovió sus nervios con ese escalofrío que hace estremecer el cuerpo, cayó de lleno en el corazón e hizo doblar las rodillas, abrir los manos que empuñaban los puñales y saltar lágrimas a los ojos [...] y al volver la vista el cantor halló las miradas de los asesinos bañadas en lágrimas y fijas en él, con la expresión de arrobamiento y de la adoración. *Ibid.*, 95.'

⁸² '¿por qué no ahoga en su canto el ruiseñor cuando el cazador lo acecha; por qué no apaga la luz de sus alas de luciérnaga cuando una mano rapaz lo persigue?' *Ibid.*

awareness of the nineteenth century reception of Stradella's legacy.⁸³ Despite these historical references, Montellanos emphasizes Stradella's vocal prowess over his compositional work, suggesting that the nineteenth century audience, removed from the original context, could only imagine the depth of his music's emotional impact. The assertion that no contemporary performance could replicate Stradella's drama and passion underscores the notion of originality.

Montellanos acknowledges that his story is primarily intended for a female audience due to its emotional depth. He is also careful to preserve Hortensia's moral integrity, a consideration likely influenced by the expectations of his readership. In contrast to other versions where Hortensia is a married woman, Montellanos portrays her as engaged rather than married, and he introduces a year-long separation before her marriage to Stradella. This narrative choice aligns with the sensibilities of young women of marriageable age, including many singers within the MPS, reinforcing the story's accessibility and moral propriety.

Kepler and Antonia by Muñoz Ledo: the German Element

Luis Felipe Muñoz Ledo published the romantic story 'A Song and a Thought,' subtitled 'Fantasy (An Imitation of German Literature),' in the fourth issue of *La armonía* published on 15 December 1866. I argue that Muñoz Ledo's story diverges from the other narratives published in the journal, which were more attuned to the sensibilities and literary conventions of Mexican readership. While the stories of Montellanos and Ortega depict themes more aligned with Mexican societal values—such as royalty, refinement, passion, love, and innocence—Muñoz Ledo employs German literary tropes, notably death for the sake of art and artistic madness. This section examines how Muñoz Ledo engaged with notions of fantasy and madness associated with German culture, which Mexican readers often perceived as amoral.

Muñoz Ledo's narrative follows Kepler, an impoverished elderly violinist residing in a wintry landscape with his ailing daughter, Antonia, whose voice is described as angelic. Kepler is portrayed as an inspired genius who receives musical ideas from a transcendental realm. In a moment of fervent madness, he records all the musical ideas that come to him. This delirious state leads him to compose a masterwork that only he and his daughter can perform. Together, they attain the musical sublime, until Antonia ultimately sacrifices herself for the sake of Art.

At the outset of this section, I established that the stories published in *La armonía* embraced the Hoffmannesque aesthetic propagated by the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*. The analysis reveals that Muñoz Ledo adapted a German narrative that employs 'madness and

⁸³ Ibid., 96.

death in artistic ecstasy' as novelistic tropes, recurrent in Schlesinger's tales.⁸⁴ In fact, Muñoz Ledo directly incorporated a passage from *Rat Krespel* by E. T. A. Hoffmann. Unlike his biographical writings, Muñoz Ledo does not emphasise the moral virtues of his characters.

In literary studies, Sergio Armando Hernández Roura has examined the reception of Hoffmann's fantastic tales in nineteenth century Mexico. He asserts that, during the first half of the century, Mexicans largely rejected Romantic elements lacking moral instruction, such as the grotesque, fear, madness, irrationality, suicide, terror, and brutal imagery, all of which were integral to Hoffmann's fantastic literature and German Romanticism. Mexicans resisted the supernatural elements prevailing in German literature, contending that the Mexican 'meridional' sensibility was not inclined towards such fantasy.⁸⁵ This notion of the Germanic world as foreign to Mexican sensibilities was influenced by Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* (1813), in which she argued that northern Germany's cold climate fostered supernatural elements and deeper, darker ideas. In her earlier work, *De la Littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800), she posited that politics, geography, economy, and religion shape culture. Drawing upon an eighteenth-century theory that divided the world into the Anglo-Saxon north and the Latin south (encompassing the Greeks, Italians, Spaniards, and French under Louis XIV), she assigned a superior status to suffering over pleasure, which she associated with the southern nations.⁸⁶

The compulsive nature of genius in producing original work, oscillating between a blessing and a curse is one of the literary tropes Muñoz Ledo engages with. Kepler is unable to suppress the musical ideas that flood his mind and is compelled to transcribe them in order to alleviate the mounting tension in his brain:

The elderly artist, melancholy as well, for a beautiful musical phrase—one of those that only genius can produce, when the very hand of God ignites its torch—swelled within his mind; yet he struggled in vain to transcribe it onto paper. [...] His thoughts, clinging ever

⁸⁴ Ellis, 'The Uses of Fiction...', 254–55.

⁸⁵ Hernández Roura, 'Traducción y circulación de las obras de Hoffmann en México..,' 135. Hernández Roura explains that this cultural distance stemmed from a longstanding process that began during the colonial period when the Catholic Church and the Spanish Empire controlled transatlantic cultural exchange. As Hernández Roura argues, centuries of strict censorship rendered German literature virtually unknown in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, the name given to Mexico between 1521 and 1821. It was only after independence, when the Church's influence over transatlantic cultural exchange waned, that German literature gradually began to circulate in Mexico. By the mid-nineteenth century, Mexican newspapers had started publishing selected works of German literature, often translated through French and Spanish intermediaries. These translations frequently adapted the German cultural context, sometimes providing explanatory footnotes to clarify cultural differences. In other cases, particularly enigmatic passages were omitted altogether. For this explanation, see pages 128–130.

⁸⁶ Sergio Armando Hernández Roura, 'Hitos de la recepción crítica de la obra de Hoffmann en México (1855–1917),' *Actio Nova: Revista de teoría de la literatura y literatura comparada* 3 (December 2019): 234.

Chapter 1

more tightly to the walls of his brain, as though seized by iron claws, refused to take shape under the convulsive fingers of the master.⁸⁷

Antonia is similarly possessed by an overwhelming force. According to Brigit Röder, Hoffmann portrays Antonie as ‘a symbol of aesthetic perfection, [which] is doomed from the outset.’ Hoffmann repeatedly references Antonie’s ethereal voice, which transcends mere artistic perfection.

This Romantic notion synthesises the Ideal and the material world, embodied by Antonia. For this reason, Röder argues that ‘her death is not only inevitable but to be expected’.⁸⁸ Muñoz Ledo follows a similar trajectory in his depiction of Antonia’s artistry: ‘She sang because her nature demanded it; just as the nightingale sings, even when its song draws upon itself the menacing claws of the hawk.’⁸⁹ Unlike Hoffmann’s tale, where Krespel forbids Antonia to sing, Muñoz Ledo’s Kepler urges his daughter to become the vehicle of his artistic mission: ‘Sing, my Antonia; here is the page that will seal my name in glory.’⁹⁰

The creative union between composer and performer is symbolised through the sublime bond between father and daughter, which carries incestuous undertones. As Ellis has demonstrated, the fictional stories in the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris* interweave sexual catharsis, singing, and death.⁹¹ Muñoz Ledo’s development of this theme is particularly striking, given that Mexican audiences often regarded such tropes as foreign and even perverse.

Antonia’s death is the leading misfortune in Hoffmann’s *Rat Krespel*. Antonia is engaged to B., a composer she met while performing in Italy before her mother’s death. At the climax of the story, the lovers perform a duet he composed, leading to her death while her father remains bedridden. William Kumbier argues that a sexual relationship exists between Antonia and her father, Krespel. According to Kumbier, the act of singing is consistently depicted as a sexualised activity, an expression of desire, during which Antonia’s cheeks are invariably flushed.⁹² This

⁸⁷ ‘El anciano artista, melancólico también, porque una hermosa frase musical, de esas que solo produce el genio, cuando la mano misma de Dios enciende su antorcha, bullía en su mente; pero en vano pugnaba por traducirla al papel [...] Su pensamiento cada vez más y más asido a las paredes de su cerebro, como si unos garfios de hierro lo apresaran, se resistía a tomar bajo forma los convulsivos dedos del maestro.’ Luis F. Muñoz Ledo, ‘Un canto y un pensamiento. Fantasía (Imitación del alemán),’ *La armonía*, no. 4 (15 December 1866): 30.

⁸⁸ Brigit Röder, *A Study of the Major Novellas of E.T.A. Hoffmann* (New York: Boydell & Brewer, 2003), 163.

⁸⁹ ‘Ella cantaba, porque su naturaleza se lo exigía; por la misma razón que canta el ruiseñor, aun cuando su canto atraiga sobre sí las acercadas garras del milano.’ Muñoz Ledo, ‘Un canto y un pensamiento...,’ 30.

⁹⁰ ‘Canta, Antonia mía: aquí está escrita la página con que sellará la gloria mi nombre;’ *Ibid.*, 30–31.

⁹¹ Ellis, ‘The Uses of Fiction...,’ 268.

⁹² William Kumbier, ‘Composed Composers: Subjectivity in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “Rat Krespel”,’ *Studies in Romanticism* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 243.

same dynamic appears in Muñoz Ledo's version, where Kepler plays the violin while Antonia sings, both reaching an ecstatic climax before her demise.

Without realizing what was happening, the unfortunate old man receives her in his arms, and embraces her with loving and paternal fervour; but as he places his lips on Antonia's forehead, already frozen by death, a terrible clarity arises in his mind, and he understands the catastrophe.

A dry cry; rather a roar, escapes from his chest and he trembles, chilled by the horror.⁹³

In Hoffmann's narrative, the incestuous relationship between Krespel and Antonia is more implicitly conveyed: she chooses to live for him. Kumbier further contends that Krespel metaphorically possesses his daughter through his violin playing, with Antonia embodying the instrument itself.⁹⁴ While the incestuous undertones were already present in Hoffmann's text, Muñoz Ledo amplifies these elements, rendering the creative act itself a symbolic sexual experience.

Hoffmann's narrative concludes with Krespel's realisation of Antonia's demise. Muñoz Ledo further explored the theme of Kepler's descent into madness, considering the profound cost he incurred as a true artist, one capable of entering the realm of the sublime.

'An impetuous gust of wind, suddenly opening the window shutters, snatches the paper from his hands and envelops it in its whirlwind.

The cherished dream of his life disappears; the mystical love for his daughter also perishes; and making his chest the field of a horrific struggle, the love of art and that of his daughter, he loses his reason, throws himself after the thought that carries that paper; snatched from his daughter, as if she were the child he had rocked in the cradle fifteen years ago; and with a supernatural force, he jumps from the balcony.'⁹⁵

Finally, Muñoz Ledo concludes the fictional narrative by engaging with the fantastical element of the cold wind echoing the introspective music, whilst transposing the bodies of Kepler and Antonia into an idealised state. The extended ellipsis serves as an onomatopoeia of the wind and the fog.

'An echo, then, repeats the final notes of a fantastic song, and the bodies of Kepler and Antonia were lost in the ether, veiled by a white vapour propelled by the wind.....
.....

⁹³ 'Sin darse cuenta de lo que pasaba, el desdichado anciano la recibe en sus brazos, la estrecha con amoroso y paternal arrebató; pero al posar sus labios sobre la frente de Antonia, helada ya por la muerte, terrible claridad se produce en su pensamiento, y comprende la catástrofe. [/] Un grito seco; más bien un rugido, sale de su pecho y tiembla aterido [sic] por el espanto.' Muñoz Ledo, 'Un canto y un pensamiento...', 131.

⁹⁴ Kumbier, 'Composed Composers...', 239.

⁹⁵ 'Impetuosa ráfaga de viento, abriendo repentinamente las celosías de una ventana, le arranca el papel de las manos y lo envuelve en su torbellino. [/] El alagado ensueño de su vida desaparece; el místico amor de su hija fenece también; y haciendo a su pecho campo de una horrible lucha, el amor del arte y el de su hija, pierde la razón, se lanza en pos del pensamiento que lleva aquel papel; arrebatada a su hija, como si fuera la niña que ha quince años mecía en la cuna; y con una fuerza sobrenatural, salta por el balcón.' Muñoz Ledo, 'Un canto y un pensamiento...', 131.

.....
⁹⁶

Through *Kepler and Antonia*, Muñoz Ledo imported German literary tropes into the pages of *La armonía*, contrasting with the more conventional Romantic themes explored by Ortega and Montellanos. This divergence highlights the MPS's engagement with diverse cultural models, while also exposing the tensions between cosmopolitan aspirations and the boundaries of Mexican literary sensibilities.

Taken together, the biographies and fictional narratives published in *La armonía* reveal how members of the MPS employed literature to construct models of the Romantic artist. Through these stories, they explored themes of genius, sacrifice, and artistic transcendence, while negotiating the boundaries between Mexican cultural values and foreign literary tropes. By placing music at the centre of fictional plots, these narratives underscored its moral and social power—an idea that became increasingly pronounced in the MPS's subsequent emphasis on the superiority of vocal over instrumental music.

Vocal Over Instrumental Music

One of the most distinctive features of the MPS was its preference for vocal over instrumental music, reflected in its emphasis on singers and operatic repertoire. Like the Conservatoire of Music in Paris, the Conservatoire of Music of the MPS prioritised vocal music over instrumental.⁹⁷ The newspaper contains numerous references to opera composers such as Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Mercadante, Verdi, Gounod, and Meyerbeer, as well as renowned European singers. In contrast, only a few articles in *La armonía* mentioned instrumental composers, including Austro-German classical figures such as Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn, Félicien David and Aniceto Ortega. As we will see in the following section, the dominance of vocal music led to the formation of the first Mexican male choir. Nonetheless, Dr Julio Clément urged the MPS Directive Board to establish an orchestra, as only a few students could pursue careers as soloist singers. For the MPS to advance, it required the active participation of all its members.

⁹⁶ 'Un eco, entonces, repite las últimas notas de un canto fantástico, y los cuerpos de Kepler y de Antonia se perdieron en el éter, velados por un blanco vapor que impulsa el viento.....

'⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ D. Kern Holoman, 'The Paris Conservatoire in the Nineteenth Century,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Topics*, ed. Walter Frisch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; online ed., Oxford Academic, 1 April 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935321.013.114>, accessed 8 January 2025.

The Choral Movement

La armonía reveals the concern of the MPS to establish the first Mexican *Orpheon*, a male choir inspired by these social and philanthropic ideals, aimed at enhancing the lives of workers. The choral movement had international significance during the nineteenth century. According to Muñoz Ledo, Mexico lacked a choir of this kind, except for the choir of the German Club, which was composed of German immigrants. Consequently, Muñoz Ledo and Julio Ituarte founded the Orpheon of the Mexican Eagle (OME), the first Mexican choir consisting of amateur members. By the end of 1867, the MPS had approved a project to teach choral singing to male workers, as it embodied the philanthropic values of the association.

This section highlights, on the one hand, the cosmopolitan philosophy of the MPS in concerts and, on the other, the inclusion of German music in the repertoire. It demonstrates that the repertoire was not limited to Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven but also included other Austro-German composers. Moreover, it underscores the predominance of vocal music within the organisation.

The choir of the German Club was a male-voice ensemble conducted by Teodoro Leede. According to records, the choir was well-known in the capital, and its conductor was a respected figure, appreciated by Mexican society.⁹⁸ The membership lists published in *La armonía* indicate that Leede held amateur status within the MPS, meaning that he was committed to rehearsing with musicians for concerts.⁹⁹ This choir performed during the first public concert at the Imperial Theatre on 7 September 1866.

The MPS announced its first public concert under the title *Great First Concert on Vocal, Instrumental, and Orpheonic Music* in late August. According to the MPS's regulations, the event aimed to raise funds to reimburse the costs of the Conservatoire's inauguration, which provided free education to over 300 pupils. Furthermore, it was a monumental occasion in which the MPS

⁹⁸ Brígida von Mentz, 'Asociaciones del grupo alemán en México,' in *Los pioneros del imperialismo alemán en México*, ed., Brígida von Mentz, Verena Radkau, Beatriz Scharrer, and Guillermo Turner R (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1982), 412–13. Mentz refers to the German Orphéon (Orfeón alemán) as the choir of the German Club. It is possible that she conflated both choirs under the same name. However, they were distinct ensembles, with different names and conductors, active at different times. On the one hand, Leede's choir bore the name of its association and was active decades before the establishment of the MPS in 1866. On the other hand, Germán Laue conducted the German Orphéon, which was active at a later period.

⁹⁹ Leede was also a pianist. On the night of the public concert, he was among the performers of the *Overture from Nabucodonosor*, arranged for twelve hands by Francisco Contreras. His surname also appears in a note on the final page of each issue of *La armonía*, which stated that musical works could be purchased at Nagel's music publishing house. However, as the list of amateur members also includes César Leede and Federico Leede, it remains uncertain to which individual the note refers.

introduced all its members, from the youngest pupils to the members of the directive board.¹⁰⁰ The concert served as a public demonstration of how music was both 'useful and agreeable,' showcasing the results achieved through nine months of dedicated effort.

That evening, while Italian opera dominated the programme, the German Club performed *La capilla del monte (Das Kirchlein)* by Valentin Eduard Becker and *Los jóvenes dilettantis (Die jungen Musikanten)* by Friedrich Wilhelm Kücken. The MPS submitted an unsigned review of its own concert. The critic made only brief remarks about Becker's piece, noting that its 'tender and mystic melodies' impressed the audience. In contrast, he provided a more detailed analysis of *Los jóvenes dilettantis*, describing it as a work of 'philosophical and imitative music' reminiscent of some melodies by Franz Schubert.¹⁰¹ Overall, he praised the choir's performance and deemed them a 'remarkable choral society'. However, it remains unclear how the public received this performance, as they may not have been accustomed to such introspective music.

Two months later, the MPS published the first issue of *La armonía*. President Manuel Siliceo listed the total number of members, noting that the choristers of the German Club had joined the amateur section: '161—Amateur members, from which 59—Married women and young ladies 102—Gentlemen, among whom we find the skilled singers of the German Club.'¹⁰² This choir was not mentioned again until the annual review, printed in January 1867, in which the directive board summarised the public concert.¹⁰³ The information suggests that the choir did not participate in any private concerts. Nonetheless, its influence can be observed in how the German Club laid the groundwork for the Mexican Orpheon.

Although the editors of *La armonía* published only two news items about the choral movement in France, their interest in the subject is evident. The first article, published in March 1867, is a verbatim translation from the 'Nouvelles' section of the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, in which the Belgian musicologist Xavier van Ewelyck (1825–1888) estimated that over 3,000 choral societies existed in his country, surpassing the equivalent German movement.¹⁰⁴ The second item, published in the twelfth issue in April, is a translation by Muñoz Ledo from *La France chorale*. It summarises Baron Taylor's international invitation to the *Festival-concours*

¹⁰⁰ Lorenzo Elízaga, 'Editorial. Nuevos auxilios a nuestros hermanos de Matamoros,' *El boletín republicano*, 20 November 1867, 1

¹⁰¹ 'Primer gran concierto público de la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana,' *La sociedad*, 29 September 1866, 1–2.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰³ José Ignacio Durán, Eduard Liceaga, and Lorenzo Elízaga, 'Reseña de los trabajos de la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana, en el año de 1866,' *La armonía*, no. 6 (15 November 1867): 42.

¹⁰⁴ 'Orfeonismo,' *La armonía*, no. 9 (1 March 1867): 71.

universel and provides a partial list of 120 choral societies that had joined the event.¹⁰⁵ This item refers to a choir competition scheduled to take place in Paris in August, as part of the *Exposition universelle* of 1867.

Notably, Muñoz Ledo printed the extended list rather than Baron Taylor's shorter version, as recorded in his invitation. The Spanish *Revista de bellas artes* had published Taylor's letter in November 1866, in which the French politician invited all choral societies to participate in a friendly contest. Furthermore, the Spanish journalist anticipated that the flourishing Catalan choirs would take part.¹⁰⁶

The news published in *La armonía* reflects a keen awareness of the gap in Mexican musical culture. While European nations had established choral institutions that thrived in 'civilised' societies, Mexico had none. This disparity likely motivated the MPS to promote orpheonism as part of its broader cultural and philanthropic mission, a conclusion supported by the MPS's own publications and contemporary press reports.

In August, following the war, the MPS resumed its activities with a private concert featuring a performance by the Orfeón del Águila Mexicana (Mexican Eagle Orpheon, hereafter, MEO). The critic Luis Gonzaga Ortíz, known as L.G.O., reviewed the event in *El siglo diez y nueve*, noting that the choir's performance of *La caza* (*The Hunt*) and *La campana* (*The Bell*) elicited enthusiasm and approval, particularly among the immigrant community 'Indeed, these last two pieces were performed with such masterly precision and a nuanced chiaroscuro that we saw some foreigners near us repeatedly applauding and showing on their faces the delight they took in listening to the skilled Orpheon singers.'¹⁰⁷ It should be noted that L.G.O. did not mention the names of the composers of either piece. Later that season, the MEO also took part in the public concerts organised in October 1867.¹⁰⁸

The MPS mentioned the second public concert in *La armonía* in November 1866. The general board appointed members to the concert commission, including Tomás León (President), Agustín Siliceo (Vice-President), Eduardo Portu (Secretary), and Ortega, Bablot, Ituarte, and Francisco Contreras (board members, known in Spanish as 'vocales').¹⁰⁹ Initially planned for early 1867, the concert was postponed without an official explanation. This delay coincided with the withdrawal of French troops by Napoleon III, which weakened the Mexican Empire and may have endangered the lives of some MPS members. Among them was Manuel

¹⁰⁵ 'Festival.—Concurso Universal,' *La armonía*, no. 12 (15 April 1867): 82–83.

¹⁰⁶ 'Orfeones y sociedades corales,' *Revista de bellas artes* (Madrid), no. 8 (25 November 1866): 5.

¹⁰⁷ L.G.O. [Luis Gonzaga Ortíz], 'Revista de la semana,' *El siglo diez y nueve*, 18 August 1867, 1.

¹⁰⁸ L.G.O. [Luis Gonzaga Ortíz], 'Revista de la semana,' *El siglo diez y nueve*, 6 October 1867, 1.

¹⁰⁹ 'Segundo concierto público,' *La armonía*, no. 2 (15 November 1866): 16.

Siliceo, former President of the association and Minister of Public Instruction, who left the country in February and lived in exile for several years.

The MPS published the final issue of *La armonía* in May 1867. After the war, writers such as Bablot and Bustamante continued publishing their articles in daily newspapers, maintaining a sense of continuity. Furthermore, former Secretary Lorenzo Elízaga sent concert invitations and programmes to the press. Had *La armonía* continued publication, it would have remained the official communication medium of the MPS.

The political upheaval of 1867 marked a turning point in the Society's cultural agenda. The withdrawal of French troops and the collapse of the Empire not only disrupted the MPS's activities but also altered the symbolic meaning of its initiatives. What had begun as a cosmopolitan project inspired by European models now acquired a different resonance within the restored Republic. In this new context, the orpheon ceased to be merely an imitation of foreign choral traditions and gradually became a vehicle for national affirmation and civic regeneration.

The MEO made its *début* in a concert that contrasted sharply with that of the previous year. While the programme of the first concert embodied the 'useful and agreeable' style of music, the second concert served as a public manifesto of the MPS's political affiliation with the re-established Republic. It is possible that, for this occasion, the orpheon's name was changed from 'Mexican Eagle' to 'National Eagle,' a modification that resonated with the prevailing nationalist sentiment. From this point forward, the ensemble will be referred to as the Orfeón del Águila Nacional (National Eagle Orpheon, hereafter NEO). At the same time, the MPS premiered Morale's symphonic hymn *¡Dios salve a la patria!* (*God Save the Nation!*), composed in Florence, alongside *Marcha Zaragoza* (*Zaragoza March*) and *Marcha Republicana* (*Republican March*) by Ortega. Moreover, President Juárez attended the concert with his family and, by the end of the evening, received the diploma that officially inducted him as a member of the MPS, with the public serving as witnesses.¹¹⁰

The NEO comprised eighteen members, including the conductor. In November, the group published a letter explaining that half of its members were unavailable, which prevented them from accepting an offer to perform. This document also detailed the organisation of the voices: five basses, five baritones, three first tenors, and four second tenors. Furthermore, it listed the names of each member, revealing that fifteen of them had been part of the ensemble

¹¹⁰ Alfredo Bablot, 'Crónica musical. Gran concierto público de la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana,' *El monitor republicano*, 5 October 1867, 2. For more information about the works of Morales and Ortega written for this concert, see: Ricardo Miranda, 'Lo que dijeron las brujas: Juárez y el estreno de la sinfonía-himno *Dios salve a la patria*,' *Historia mexicana* 70, no. 4 (March 2021): 1949–86.

since 1866.¹¹¹ This evidence confirms that the group was composed exclusively of Mexican choristers.

Bablot reviewed the concert, praising the quality of the choir's singing and the progress they had achieved in only six months. He observed: 'They performed the most difficult pieces without accompaniment, with such perfection that European choirs only achieve after years of diligence. This,' he concluded, 'is proof of the aptitude of Mexicans for music.'¹¹² His remarks should be understood as a political statement, reinforcing the next stage of the choir's mission: the inclusion of workers. Following the orpheon's success, Muñoz Ledo and three other members of the ONE submitted a proposal to the MPS's General Board, requesting authorisation to establish night classes for workers.

Bustamante dedicated an article to 'orfeonism,' in which he referenced Van Elewyck's data on Belgian choirs and reproduced the ONE's proposal. As a liberal thinker, he celebrated the initiative to extend music education to workers, emphasising that it would serve as a recreational activity while also opening new opportunities for them '[...] not only to provide them with new and agreeable knowledge that may serve as a means of subsistence, but also to improve their customs, influence their social behaviour, foster new relationships, and distance them from harmful habits.'¹¹³ The proposal outlined the virtues of music and its potential to aid the 'dispossessed,' the neglected sector of society. The members of the ONE argued that workers suffered because 'they know only one way of life, in which they are mistreated.'¹¹⁴ Through this project, they sought to create a space where the dispossessed could aspire to virtue and self-improvement: 'And can we ignore, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the urgent need to save this social class, which asks only for a guiding light? Certainly not!'¹¹⁵ The MPS approved the project.

In December 1867, Ituarte published an invitation in the press, calling on workers to enrol in the 'Class for Artisans' held in the evenings. He sought to capture their interest by

¹¹¹ Néstor Montes, Antonio Valderas [Balderas], Luis F. Muñoz Ledo, Tomás Hernández, Alberto G. Hermosillo, Francisco Salas, José Rojas, Juan Ibarri, Román Murguía, Daniel Ituarte, and Julio Ituarte, 'Orfeón del Águila Mexicana,' *El boletín republicano*, 12 November 1867, 3.

¹¹² Alfredo Bablot, 'Crónica musical. Gran concierto público de la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana,' *El monitor republicano*, 5 October 1867, 2.

¹¹³ 'No sólo para proporcionarles por este medio nuevos y agradables conocimientos que pueden serles muy útiles como medios de subsistencia, sino con el de mejorar las costumbres, por lo mucho que influyen en ello las nuevas relaciones sociales en que se les coloca, al paso que se les retira de otras que les son peligrosas.' Gabino F. Bustamante, 'Orfeonismo,' *El monitor republicano*, 17 November 1867, 1.

¹¹⁴ 'Néstor Montes, Tomás Hernández, Antonio Balderas, and Luis F. Muñoz Ledo, in Gabino F. Bustamante, 'Orfeonismo,' *El monitor republicano*, 17 November 1867, 2.

¹¹⁵ '¿Y puede dejarse pasar desapercibida, en medio del siglo XIX, la necesidad urgente de acudir a la salvación de esta clase de la sociedad, que solo demanda una luz que la guie en su ruta? ¡De ninguna manera!' Gabino F. Bustamante, 'Orfeonismo,' *El monitor republicano*, 17 November 1867, 2.

promising that they would cultivate an art form that combined the useful with the agreeable, yielding positive results similar to those observed in Germany and France.¹¹⁶

In sum, the Society's preference for vocal over instrumental music was not merely a matter of taste, but a reflection of broader cultural values. By prioritising operatic repertoire, promoting the *orphéon*, and aspiring to emulate European models, the MPS situated itself within an international conversation on music's social role, as part of the civilising world. At the same time, debates over the orchestra and the education of artisans reveal the tensions between cosmopolitan ideals and local realities. Together, these initiatives positioned vocal music as both a civilising force and a vehicle for Mexico's cultural modernisation.

Creating an Orchestra to Fulfil the MPS Mission

Circa 1866, Julio Clément, a Bohemian doctor and musician, requested the leading board to introduce more instrumental classes to facilitate the formation of an orchestra. Clément believed that the MPS was overly focused on vocal music, neglecting students whose talents were better suited to instrumental performance than singing. He observed 'Out of one hundred individuals taken at random, scarcely one will possess a fine voice; four or five will have a tolerable one; twelve will sing well enough to blend into a choir; in total, barely twenty are suited to vocal cultivation.'¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Clément argued that only a few students could perform as piano soloists, while a slightly larger number could play at a decent level. In his view, the MPS's mission would remain unfulfilled until it was capable of forming an orchestra, which, in time, should be composed of accomplished teachers. However, he acknowledged that achieving this goal would take time, as the MPS lacked the financial resources to compensate such teachers. Clément urged the Directive Board to offer teachers 'immediate advantages that would satisfy them'. He insisted that the MPS should provide the necessary foundation:

1. Let us openly and sincerely welcome all teachers.
2. Let us grant each of them a title that acknowledges their merits.
3. Let us earnestly seek out enthusiasts, both strong and weak, provided they are not, like myself, remnants of the past.
4. In addition to the regular and free courses at the Conservatoire, let us ensure that, under the supervision of the commission, designated teachers open specialised instrumental courses reserved for students who can pay a moderate fee.
5. Once we have twenty performers, let us declare the orchestra established.
6. Let us ensure the orchestra holds two weekly rehearsals.

¹¹⁶ Julio Ituarte, 'Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana. A los artesanos,' *El boletín republicano*, 31 December 1867, 4.

¹¹⁷ 'Sobre cien individuos tomados al acaso, encontrareis uno apenas que disfrute de buena voz; cuatro o cinco tendrán una voz soportable; doce cantarán lo bastante para mezclarse a un coro; por junto, veinte mal contados son aptos para cultivar la voz.' Julio Clément, *Carta dirigida a la junta directiva de la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana por el Dr. Julio Clément* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Vicente G. Torres, a cargo de C. Moreno, 1868), 17.

7. For this purpose, let us appoint a conductor, two copyists, and an artist to arrange the pieces and adapt them for the performers.

8. Let us introduce the orchestra at Society rehearsals as soon as it reaches an acceptable standard.

9. Let us use these rehearsals to encourage young musicians who lack experience, integrating them into the orchestra as soon as feasible.

In this way, within a short period, young people will learn to practise and appreciate instrumental music, teachers will have students, and the Society will have an orchestra.¹¹⁸

Clément asked the Directive Board to attract more students, especially workers and people of low class. This idea followed the social objectives of improving society, in the same way as the choral movement.

Clément's proposal reveals that, from its earliest years, the MPS was aware of the limitations of a curriculum centred almost exclusively on vocal music. His call for an orchestra framed instrumental practice as essential to the Society's mission of educating a broad social spectrum, including workers and artisans. Although financial constraints delayed this initiative, the very terms of the debate help explain why, two decades later, figures such as Gustavo Campa would advocate for instrumental cultivation as a progressive step in Mexico's musical life.

In conclusion, the tension between vocal and instrumental cultivation within the Philharmonic Society illustrates both the breadth and the limits of its civilising mission. While the preference for vocal music reflected cosmopolitan ideals aligned with European models, internal debates on the formation of an orchestra revealed anxieties about inclusivity, professional opportunities, and the balance between artistic refinement and social utility. These discussions did not remain confined to the 1860s: they provided the framework against which later generations—most notably Campa—would define what it meant for music to be both progressive and modern in Mexico.

¹¹⁸ '1. Abramos ostensible y sinceramente las puertas a todos los profesores. [/] 2. Demos a cada uno de ellos un título que consagre sus méritos. [/] 3. Solicitemos con empeño a los aficionados fuerte y débiles, siempre que no sean como yo, del pasado. [/] 4. Además de los cursos regulares y gratuitos del Conservatorio, hagamos que en dicho establecimiento, bajo la dirección de la comisión del mismo, se abran por los profesores designados cursos de especialidades instrumentales, que se reservarán para alumnos que paguen una retribución moderada. [/] 5. Luego que tengamos veinte ejecutantes, declaremos que está fundada la orquesta. [/] 6. Hagamos que tenga dos ensayos semanarios. [/] 7. Instituyamos con este objeto el director de orquesta, dos copistas, un artista que arregle las piezas y las ponga al alcance de los ejecutantes. [/] 8 Presentemos a la orquesta en los ensayos de la Sociedad luego que sea tolerable. [/] 9. Sirvámonos de esos ensayos para llamar a la orquesta a los jóvenes que no saben, y démosles ocupación en ella luego que sea posible. [/] De esta manera, en poco tiempo, la juventud aprenderá a practicar y a amar la música instrumental, los maestros tendrán lecciones, y la Sociedad una orquesta.' *Ibid.*, 26–27.

Chapter 2 Creating the Mexican Wagner and the *Davidsbündler* (1882–1887)

‘Il est des esprits convaincus des bienfaits de l’art musical,
ardents à propager son culte,
à combattre tout ce qui tend à le rabaisser.’
Eusèbe Lucas¹

In 1885, a critic of the daily newspaper *El diario del hogar* offered a revealing perspective on what Gustavo Campa (1863-1934) represented in Mexico city’s philharmonic circles at the time:

[He] is well known in the philharmonic circles of the capital, and despite his young age, his record of service in the divine art rivals that of a seasoned veteran of music. His compositions are deeply inspired, full of *esprit*, originality, and beauty—earning him, quite deservedly, the nickname among his peers: the Mexican Wagner.²

This description encapsulates both Campa’s own construction of his image and the way he was perceived in his early career: a devoted servant of art and a symbol of musical reform. It evokes an image of a young composer engaged in a cultural struggle, introducing the music of Wagner to a public still rooted in Italian operatic traditions. However, this image—of a heroic figure fighting for progress—contrasts sharply with how Campa has been remembered in Mexican music historiography. Despite him being a prolific composer, conductor, pianist, critic, and teacher active between 1880 and 1925, Campa has largely been reduced to two fixed roles: that of a *francesista* (a proponent of French music), and that of a polemical critic. This oversimplification has relegated him to the margins of history, overshadowed by figures such as Ricardo Castro and Felipe Villanueva—two of his closest friends and collaborators.

This chapter seeks to reconsider the Campa of the 1880s—the ‘Mexican Wagner’—by examining the group of musicians and ideas that coalesced around him. Campa’s artistic outlook was deeply shaped by the Romantic ideal of the artist as philosopher and cultural guide, an ideal instilled in him by his teachers during his early years. He used this ideal not only to define his identity in contrast with his teachers but also to position himself as part of a new generation of reformers who envisioned instrumental, ‘elevated’ music as a path to cultural advancement.

¹ Eusèbe Lucas, *Les concerts classiques en France* (Paris: Sandoz & Fischbacher, 1876), 3.

² ‘Es muy conocido en los círculos filarmónicos de la capital, y no obstante, [a] su temprana edad su hoja de servicios en el divino arte corresponde al de un viejo veterano de la música; sus composiciones son inspiradísimas, llenas de *esprit*, originalidad y belleza, valiéndole, y con mucha razón el apodo entre sus compañeros del *Wagner mexicano*.’ ‘Un acontecimiento musical,’ *El diario del hogar*, 7 August 1885, 3.

Campa did not stand alone. An analysis of concert reviews of his compositions, together with his own music criticism, reveals a small but determined circle of musicians—pianists, string players, and singers—committed to Germanic repertoire and new musical forms. This group gravitated around influential figures such as the retired soprano and critic Fanny Natali (c. 1835–1891) alias *Titania*, and participated in events that blurred the lines between performance and ideology.³ Through benefit concerts, private soirées, and public polemics, these musicians carved out a space for what they saw as a modern, cosmopolitan, and intellectually serious musical culture.

Understanding their efforts to establish a modern musical culture also requires attention to infrastructure—or the lack thereof. Unlike European capitals with dedicated concert halls, Mexico City in the 1880s had no formal venue for symphonic music. Musicians operated within a patchwork of salons and multipurpose theatres, making every concert a negotiation of space, audience, and ambition. Yet these precarious conditions also fostered tightly curated programs and fertile intellectual exchanges.

In this context, Campa's trajectory becomes particularly telling. His compositions from the early 1880s, his role as a cultural critic, and eventually his founding (with Juan Hernández Acevedo) of the short-lived Instituto Musical Campa-Hernández in 1886, all show a desire to reshape musical life from within. Their school, dedicated to 'popularising modern doctrines,'⁴ was a response to perceived deficiencies at the National Conservatoire, and an experiment in alternative music education.

By placing Campa back into the performance and intellectual networks of his time, this chapter argues that far from being a lone *francesista*—a term used pejoratively in Mexico to describe those excessively attached to French models—Campa was part of a broader effort to redefine musical modernity in Mexico—not simply by copying European models, but by adapting them to a fragile and ambivalent local context. The chapter unfolds in three main parts. First, it offers an overview of the ideology of the 'true artist,' the Romantic notion of the artist as philosopher and cultural guide, that shaped young Campa, a concept that would later become central to the self-fashioning image sustaining the figure of the 'Mexican Wagner'. Second, it

³ Married to the tenor Enrico Testa, she was referred to in nineteenth-century newspapers and later historiography by her married name, Fanny Natali de Testa, or simply under her pseudonym *Titania*. Recent scholarship by Paulina Molina Díaz has clarified that Fanny Heron O'Reilly was her birth name. For further information on her family background, see Paulina Isabel Molina Díaz, *Ser mujer y escribir de música: la crítica musical del siglo XIX en la Ciudad de México a través del trabajo periodístico de Fanny Heron O'Reilly "Titania."* (Master's Thesis, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2023), 104, 115–116, 121. In this dissertation, I follow the name most commonly used in the nineteenth-century press.

⁴ 'vulgarizar las doctrinas modernas,' 'Instituto Musical,' *El siglo diez y nueve*, 20 October 1886, 2.

introduces the circle of musicians around Campa, examining the types of music they promoted and the artistic ideas they championed. Third, it analyses their strategies for achieving visibility within Mexico City's concert culture, as well as the early emergence of a militant tone that recalls Wagnerism.

In so doing, we recover a moment when music functioned as both personal expression and public argument—and when the figure of the 'Mexican Wagner' captured a broader vision of artistic reform and cultural modernity, pointing toward a complex, often contradictory vision of cultural progress.

Campa, 'the Mexican Wagner': Romantic Self-Fashioning and the Search for Cultural Prestige

As previously noted, scholars have often described Campa as a defender of French music. However, labelling him simply as a *francesista* is an oversimplification. His admiration for French culture must be properly contextualised.

Campa's *francesismo* was shaped by the broader cultural and political dynamics of the period. As argued in the introduction and the first chapter, this admiration reflects both the imperial presence of France in Latin America and the Latin American elites' desire for validation from France. The phenomenon of *Frenchification* in late nineteenth-century Latin America arose from a convergence of forces: on the one hand, the cultural aspirations of Latin American elites to be recognised as part of Europe; on the other, the imperial, political, and economic ambitions of the French state. In addition, Paris was the primary centre for the dissemination of musical ideas and printed materials in Europe and abroad.

Nevertheless, as I argue, the notion of *Frenchification* offers a reductive view of nineteenth-century cultural dynamics. The previous chapter demonstrated the interconnection between German and French intellectual traditions through the analysis of *La armonía*, which revealed the dissemination of German Romantic ideals and composers via the French press—especially through journals such as the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*. In this sense, French culture functioned as the 'righteous' or legitimate model of civilisation for Campa, just as it did for many Latin American elites. This image was, to a significant extent, constructed by France itself, which presented Paris as the natural centre of musical civilisation—an idea reinforced by its substantial cultural infrastructure: opera houses, concert halls, churches, conservatoires, musical societies, orchestras, and a refined tradition of music criticism, and to which Campa would advocate for establishing in Mexico. However, Campa would not set foot in Europe until 1900. His idealised image of the cultural machinery of the Old World was

constructed almost entirely through the consumption of international music criticism, primarily French, or French translations of other European sources. It is plausible that his early admiration for Wagner was shaped by the mythologised accounts of the *Ring*'s premiere at Bayreuth in 1876, which a thirteen-year-old Campa and his friends would have read about in the press.

Campa indeed consumed a significant body of French music criticism and translations. He cultivated his public persona as a critic through a commitment to establishing a form of music criticism written by professional musicians, positioning himself as a reformer of taste and judgement. He frequently cited his sources, which have proven useful for reconstructing his intellectual networks. His critical writings reference a diverse range of figures, including French critics such as Camille Bellaigue, Fétis, Hugues Imbert, Adolphe Jullien, Camille Saint-Saëns; Spanish critics like Antonio Peña y Goñi and Joaquín Marsillach; and the Italian critic Filippo Filippi. The sources he drew from included national and international newspapers, music journals, and collections of essays. Moreover, Campa followed the tradition of the *connoisseur critic*, a model which, by the late nineteenth century, had evolved into the figure of the composer-critic. In the following section, I examine the critical tradition known as *crítica artística*, to which Campa's writings respond. His combative tone and intellectual stance were grounded in the authority of the *connoisseur*. He considered himself a practitioner of impartial, principled criticism—one that granted him the moral and intellectual legitimacy to identify flaws and raise concerns.⁵

Moreover, the intellectual background in which Gustavo Campa grew up played a very important role in shaping his vision of art and culture. Gustavo was the son of the artist Luis G. Campa (-), who taught engraving at the Academia de San Carlos and also worked as a photographer. Luis began his training at the Academia, where he met Antíocho Cruces. In 1862, the two founded the renowned photography studio *Cruces y Campa*, which operated until 1877. According to Patricia Massé's biographical sketch, Luis Campa was awarded a scholarship in 1866 to deepen his knowledge of engraving techniques and to purchase materials.⁶ *Cruces y Campa* became known for its photographic portraits of Mexican society. Their subjects included members of the imperial court of Maximilian, figures from the Liberal Party, and other prominent members of the elite. They also produced occupational portraits and so-called 'Mexican types,' depicting street vendors and lower-class workers. Their collection *Tipos populares mexicanos*

⁵ These principles were explored in Fernanda Muñoz Salazar, "*La crítica artística*" como sinónimo de progreso en la crítica musical de Gustavo E. Campa (Master's thesis, Universidad Veracruzana, 2018). The tradition of European music criticism is presented in chapter 2, 13–39, and the subjects discussed in Campa's criticism is presented in chapter 3, 40–54.

⁶ Patricia Massé, 'Luis Campa, grabador y fotógrafo,' *Historias*, no. 26 (September 1991): 86.

won a bronze medal at the 1876 Centennial International Exhibition in Philadelphia.⁷ Moreover, Luis Campa was an artist who possibly participated in intellectual and artistic circles, which invites us to consider the cultural networks surrounding his son. The membership list of the *Comisión científica, artística y literaria*, founded in 1864, shows Luis Campa as a member of Section Ten, which was devoted to the Fine Arts—including painting, sculpture, architecture, music, engraving, and related disciplines. That same section featured several notable figures, such as its president, Lorenzo de la Hidalga (architect of the National Theatre); vice-president and Spanish painter Pelegrín Clavé (1811–1880), then director of the Academia de San Carlos; painter Juan Cordero (1822–1884); and Félix Clément, physician and musician (presented in the previous chapter).⁸ For these reasons, Luis Campa’s close ties to the Academia of San Carlos and his participation in artistic institutions suggest that young Gustavo grew up immersed in a cosmopolitan environment shaped by artistic values and intellectual engagement⁹—qualities that would later become central to his own core values.

Another key aspect to consider is the influence of the Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana (Mexican Philharmonic Society, MPS) on Campa’s intellectual formation. According to biographical sources, Campa began his musical education at the age of ten under the guidance of Juan Loretto (1831–1924), initially regarding music as a recreational pursuit. He later studied piano with Felipe Larios (c. 1813–1875) and Julio Ituarte, one of the founders of the *Orfeón del Águila Mexicana* (discussed in the previous chapter). Between 1880 and 1883, Campa took private lessons in harmony and composition with Melesio Morales, who played a strong influence on the young musician. During this same period, he enrolled at the National Conservatoire, presenting only annual examinations in order to obtain an official diploma, as he did not attend regular classes.¹⁰ It is worth noting that Larios, Ituarte, and Morales—founding members of the MPS—were all active pianists, composers, conductors, arrangers, and pedagogues who played a significant role in the musical life of Mexico City. They were intellectually engaged artists who remained informed about musical developments in other

⁷ Cruces y Campa, photographer., and Penedo, Manuel, photographer. [*Cruces y Campa Mexican carte-de-visite album*], 1863–1866, 1863. Visited on 21 May 2025. Historian Mauricio Tenorio Trillo has studied the role that photographs had in the construction of Mexico’s identity in World Fairs, including the 1876 Philadelphia Fair. See: Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *Mexico at the World’s Fair: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 118. In UC Press E-Books Collection, 1982–2004, <https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft2k4004k4&chunk.id=d0e2928&toc.depth=1&oc.id=d0e2525&brand=ucpress;query=campa#1> (accessed 21 May 2025).

⁸ ‘Comisión científica, artística y literaria,’ *La sociedad*, 9 April 1864, 3–4.

⁹ Rogelio Álvarez Meneses, author of the most recent biography on Campa, considers that the Campas occupied a socially and economically comfortable position, due to Luis’s close relationship with the political elite. Rogelio Álvarez Meneses, ‘La presencia de México en la revista *Ilustración Musical Hispano-Americana* a través de la correspondencia de Gustavo E. Campa,’ *Cuadernos de Música Iberoamericana* 22 (2011): 128.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

cultural centres. After the MPS's Conservatoire was brought under state control in 1876, both Ituarte and Morales continued to teach at the institution. It is likely that their intellectual curiosity resonated with that of the young Campa and may even have contributed to shaping his own interests. During his first year at the Conservatoire, Campa wrote a dissertation entitled *La armonía*, which traced the history of harmony from prehistory to the early modern period (a topic to which I shall return later).¹¹ This ambitious project already reveals the intellectual curiosity of the sixteen- or seventeen-year-old student. At the time, the Conservatoire had among its faculty two of the most intellectually oriented music teachers: Morales and Alfredo Bablot, both well-respected music critics in the capital. It is possible that they exposed Campa to broader historical and aesthetic debates. In 1889, Morales remarked that discussions on Wagnerism and the critique of Italianism had long since been exhausted in his exchanges with Campa.¹²

It should be noted that Campa lived a transition at the National Conservatoire in 1882. Following the nationalisation of the Conservatoire in 1876, the singer and former member of the MPS, Antonio Balderas (1820–1882), was appointed director of the institution in 1877 and remained in that post until his death in April 1882. According to Luisa Zanolli, historiography has often characterised Balderas's administration as chaotic for several reasons. Chief among them was the institution's ongoing financial instability following its change of status, despite Ignacio Ramírez's promise of state funding and the Federal Treasury's allocation of an annual budget to support it. Simultaneously, the Conservatoire underwent significant disruptions during the early years of Balderas's leadership. Notably, the curriculum was repeatedly modified, and courses such as History of Music—one of the innovative subjects introduced by the MPS's Conservatoire in 1866—were removed. These changes also undermined the position of the teaching staff, who no longer enjoyed any job security within the institution. Another major issue was the mismanagement of the Conservatoire's material resources. For instance, no inventory was produced to account for the resources transferred from the MPS to the government in 1877, nor was there any record of acquisitions made by the Conservatoire in subsequent years. Additionally, the shortage and deterioration of musical instruments, as well as the lack of music books, became increasingly serious problems over time.¹³ By the early 1880s, the state of the institution had become critical and required urgent intervention.

¹¹ Gustavo E. Campa, *La armonía. Disertación y revista histórica de esta ciencia* (Mexico City, Imprenta de Ignacio Escalante, 1881). The cover page indicates that Campa publicly delivered his dissertation on 30 November 1880.

¹² Páris [Melesio Morales], 'Lohengrin,' *La patria*, 20 July 1890, 2.

¹³ Luisa de María Zanolli Fabila, *La profesionalización de la enseñanza musical en México: El Conservatorio Nacional de Música (1866-1996). Su historia y su vinculación con el arte, la ciencia y la tecnología en el contexto nacional*. Vol. 1 (Mexico City: INBA, 2017), 132–134.

The French musician Alfredo Bablot (1827–1892) became the second director of the National Conservatoire after its nationalisation. He assumed the position on 7 July 1882 and remained in office until his death in 1892.¹⁴ In contrast to his predecessor, Antonio Balderas, Bablot's administration has been described as a period of flourishing for the institution. Born in Bordeaux, France, Bablot arrived in Mexico in 1849 as the representative of the soprano Anna Bishop and eventually settled in the capital. He was one of the founding members of the MPS and a key contributor to *La armonía*, where he wrote on scientific and musical topics, including reviews of private concerts between 1866 and 1867. Today, he is best remembered for his influential role as a music critic, particularly for his column *Crónica musical*. Bablot was a trusted figure of President Manuel González and of Joaquín Baranda, Minister of Public Instruction. He was appointed to lead an ambitious reform project to reorganise the Conservatoire, with the goal of designing and implementing a new curriculum.¹⁵ It is worth noting that Porfirio Díaz's first presidential term (1876–1880) was followed by the administration of González (1880–1884), after which Díaz returned to power and was subsequently re-elected in the 1888 elections.¹⁶ Among Bablot's achievements as director were the acquisition of musical instruments, specialised reference works, and teaching materials used at leading European conservatoires. He also sought to build a comprehensive collection of classical compositions and scores representing the major musical schools of thought.¹⁷ This institutional context, and the pedagogical ideals held by the former members of the MPS, deeply shaped the environment in which Campa developed his early views on musical progress and civilisation.

Although Campa sought to distinguish himself from previous generations who held positions of power, his concept of progress remained rooted in the broader nineteenth-century discourse of civilisation. As will be shown, Campa's understanding of civilisation, in fact, aligned closely with that of the MPS, discussed in the previous chapter. Founded in 1866, the MPS argued that Mexico should become a civilised nation in order to claim its rightful place within the civilised world. However, the political and economic instability that followed the country's independence in 1821 had hindered such aspirations. In response, the MPS developed a pedagogical and social programme based on the ideal of Human Flourishing—a Romantic philosophy that emphasised the social utility of music for the benefit of Mexican society.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ As François-Xavier Guerra notes, Díaz's political dominance became increasingly absolute by 1888, with the 1900 elections rendered essentially fictitious, see: François-Xavier Guerra, *Del antiguo régimen a la revolución*. Vol. 1 (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988), 29.

¹⁷ Zanolli Fabila, *La profesionalización de la enseñanza musical*, 136.

This vision included the establishment of a national conservatoire of music, the founding of a musical journal to promote historical, aesthetic, and scientific knowledge, and the organisation of both public and private concerts. One of its principal goals was to educate true artists—musicians who would transcend the mechanical aspects of performance to embody the ideal of the philosopher-poet, infused with historical consciousness. For the MPS, musical progress was associated with the performance of Italian opera, the reception of the Viennese Classical school, and the assimilation of French musical thought through specialised journals. The MPS viewed the Italian and German traditions as contrasting musical poles, with the French school synthesising what they regarded as the best qualities of both.

While Campa inherited the MPS's progressive and civilising impetus, he came to view its cultural model as outdated. Although he initially supported the reform of musical taste through the promotion of the so-called Modern School—a blend of French, German, and Italian avant-garde figures such as Arrigo Boito and late-period Verdi—after 1886, he took a more radical stance. He began to advocate for French Wagnerism as the sole legitimate path in musical evolution. This shift reflected a deeper change in his understanding of modernity and civilisation, as he moved beyond the Latin ideal of the 'Italy of the Americas' and sought alternative models for Mexico's cultural development.

Campa's position was controversial. As discussed in the previous chapter and explored further below, Mexican musical taste in the nineteenth century gravitated towards Italian and French traditions. Germanic culture, by contrast, was often perceived as cold, rational, and emotionally distant—characteristics that clashed with a local sensibility inclined towards melodic, expressive, and accessible music. German music was frequently associated with harmonic complexity, intellectual abstraction, and an 'elevated' artistic realm, just as German literature was often framed through the lens of fantasy and metaphysics. In this cultural context, Campa's advocacy for Wagnerism was particularly bold. After 1886, he began championing French Wagnerism as the 'rightful' and only legitimate path in the evolution of music. His attacks on the Conservatoire as a bastion of Italianism, and his call to reshape national taste through Germanic ideals, stirred strong reactions. In 1889, after years of silence, an irritated Melesio Morales accused Campa of trying to 'Germanise' Mexican musical culture—a conflict that will be examined in greater detail in this and the following chapters.

Unpacking the Layers of the 'Mexican Wagner'

The quotation that opens this chapter marks a key distinction that warrants contextualisation. The critic from *El diario del hogar* observed that Campa's friends referred to him as 'the Mexican

Wagner.’ This nickname is far from trivial—it captures multiple layers that, once unpacked, reveal significant political and aesthetic implications.

By 1885, Wagner held a prominent position in the cultural imaginary. As mentioned, it is highly possible that Campa and his circle had grown up reading mythical accounts of the premiere of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in Bayreuth in 1876, widely reported in the press. A survey of news, articles and biographical sketches published in the Mexican press between 1860 and 1890 reveals a striking transformation in Wagner’s public image during these years. Initially depicted as a madman who rejected tradition, Wagner was gradually reimagined as a misunderstood genius, a suffering poet, a revolutionary figure, and ultimately a source of national pride. Mexican critics echoed the anti-Wagnerian attitude of the French press, often referring to him as the *composer of the future* in a sarcastic and derogatory tone. They mocked Wagner as a pretentious reformer who claimed to have invented a new musical language—one that rejected melody and embraced noise. Following the 1876 premiere of the *Ring* cycle, critics began to question whether Wagner’s works were the product of a disordered mind or that of a revolutionary founding a new school. In this context, Wagner emerged as a Romantic hero: a rebel, reformer, and messiah figure with an ungovernable will, cast as a priest of a new artistic religion that sought to sever all ties with the past.¹⁸ These archetypes—firmly tied to ideas of progress and modernity—would serve as Campa’s compass in promoting his artistic vision.

However, Wagner’s image was widely rejected in Mexico. He was often perceived as a threatening presence whose influence had led to a crisis in musical composition. This view is illustrated by Melesio Morales’s criticism. In November 1883, during the Italian opera season, Morales invoked the term *Wagnerian crisis* to describe the composer’s growing impact. For someone who valued the bel canto tradition, the direction in which Wagner was leading musical progress was cause for concern, especially since Wagner had died only months earlier, in February of that same year. To express his disapproval, Morales wrote:

It is certain that the crisis promoted—but unresolved—by Wagnerian nihilism continues to keep musical minds in a state of desperate confusion. From these fevered minds emerge nothing but forced combinations of sounds, lacking indiscernible flavour or inspiration; amorphous agglomerations of dissonant chords without melody, without concept, without idea; groupings of choral and instrumental masses engaged in harmonic calculations of immense sonority that strike the nervous system with harsh perception but fail to move the fibres of sentiment.¹⁹

¹⁸ Fernanda Muñoz Salazar, ‘¿Progreso y civilización? Destellos románticos en torno al estreno de Lohengrin de Richard Wagner en la prensa mexicana en 1890,’ in *Más allá del amor, la nostalgia, la pasión y el éxtasis... El romanticismo en México, siglo XIX*, ed. Laura Suárez de la Torre (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología, 2020), 244–248.

¹⁹ ‘Ciertamente, que la crisis promovida y no resuelta por el nihilismo wagneriano, mantiene a tiempo en desesperante desorden la actividad de los cerebros musicales fuentes rebotadas de donde no brotan

Morales's critique is rooted in two key aesthetic positions. First, he calls Wagner the *nihilist of composers*—a condemnation of Wagner's irreverence for compositional rules and his disdain for musical tradition. Morales's use of the term *nihilist* directly opposes the views of Wagner's admirers, who praised him as a reformer or revolutionary.²⁰ Second, Morales advances the idea that Wagner's music was the product of a disordered mind and that its influence disrupted healthy cognitive function. This notion resonates with the ideals promoted by the MPS (discussed in the previous chapter), which advocated for the moral and civilising effects of harmonic music on society.

Later in the same article, Morales characterised the musical landscape as passing through a transitional period, tempering the claims of Wagnerians who viewed their school as the only rightful path. He argued that Wagnerism had not triumphed entirely, declaring: 'There remain a few apostles of melody who, without opposing the progress that has begun, can nonetheless fully satisfy the needs—particularly for acceptable innovations—that the dignity of our lyric stage demands.'²¹ This shows how the aesthetic divide was frequently framed as a cultural opposition between the Italian and German schools—a framework that gave meaning to Campa's nickname as 'the Mexican Wagner.'

Critics identified him more as a harmonist than a melodist, a distinction tied to his command of counterpoint, motivic development, and symphonic orchestration. His early dissertation *La armonía* (1880) already demonstrated this orientation, offering a historical overview of harmony's evolution. Similar views circulated in the writings of Catalan critic Joaquín Marsillach, who denounced the dominance of melody and argued against reducing the orchestra to a mere supporting role. Such ideas reflected a broader shift in which melody and harmony became markers of civilisation (explored in Chapter 4).

Campa as Wagner the *Harmonist*

The first reason, therefore, why Campa was known as 'the Mexican Wagner' lay in his harmonic aspirations as a composer.²² Between 1882 and 1884 he began to appear regularly in Mexico

más que forzadas combinaciones de sonidos sin sabor determinado y sin inspiración; informes aglomeraciones de acordes disonantes, sin melodía, sin concepto, sin idea; agrupaciones de masas corales e instrumentales realizando cálculos armónicos de potentísima sonoridad que hieren con tosca percepción del sistema nervioso, pero no interesan las fibras del sentimiento.' Páris [Melesio Morales], 'Crónica musical. El trovador,' *El nacional*, 22 November 1883, 1.

²⁰ For Wagner as a revolutionary figure, see: Mitchell Cohen, 'To the Dresden Barricades: The Genesis of Wagner's Political Ideas,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 47–64; Mark Berry, 'Revolutionary Politics,' in *Wagner in Context*, ed. David Trippet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 159–167.

²¹ Páris [Melesio Morales], 'Crónica musical. El trovador,' *El nacional*, 22 November 1883, 1.

²² An analysis of Campa's music is needed to determine whether the features discussed in the press transcend into his compositions—particularly in terms of his appropriation of Wagner's language and that

City's musical events, gradually earning a reputation for serious, harmonically rich music. Federico Gamboa remembered Campa and Ricardo Castro performing their works at Fanni Natali's soirées: 'and there Gustavo Campa and Ricardo Castro played together or alone, selected pieces from their best compositions, the very works that had earned them such a great and well-deserved reputation.'²³ Their friendship was celebrated as a fruitful relationship and a great promise for Mexican art.

Campa and his critics drew on well-established Romantic archetypes to shape his public image. As previously discussed, the idea of the artist as a moral and intellectual guide had already been articulated by Luis Muñoz Ledo in his *Estudios históricos* (1866) and in the biographies he contributed to *La armonía* (1866–1867), in the context of the Mexican Philharmonic Society's civilising project. This model of the artist emphasised not only technical mastery, but also philosophical, historical, and scientific knowledge, forming part of a universal intellectual ideal. Mexican composers such as Luis Baca and Joaquín Beristain—both of whom died young—were portrayed as Romantic heroes, misunderstood geniuses, healers of a sick society. While Campa inherited many of these traits, his own positioning reflected a subtle shift. The MPS had promoted a socially engaged vision of music grounded in the motto *Utile et dulci* ('Useful and agreeable'), where harmony was not only musical but also moral. Campa, by contrast, seemed to move towards a more idealist stance, increasingly aligned with the principle of Art for art's sake—the notion that art needs no justification or end—and with the authority of aesthetic autonomy, which moved him in a different direction.

While Gamboa's account already presents Campa and Castro as celebrated composers in private circles, their public prominence became increasingly visible. Concert programmes between 1882 and 1884 show that both artists' early orchestral works were written for festivities and civic concerts. On 21 August 1882, students of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria celebrated the birthday of their director, the esteemed naturalist Alfonso Herrera (–), with a concert held at the National Theatre. According to writer Luis G. Iza, the programme began with *Marcha sagrada* (*Sacred March*) for orchestra, composed by Campa. It was followed by *Himno a la ciencia* (*Hymn to Science*) by Castro, with lyrics written and performed by student-singer Agustín M. Lazo (–).²⁴ Iza noted that the hymn was performed by a student choir of seventy voices. The concert continued with two comedic plays, *Una idea feliz* and *Guerra para hacer las*

of other modern composers—or whether these elements remain purely discursive, functioning primarily as a political stance.

²³ 'y allí Gustavo Campa y Ricardo Castro tocaban juntos o solos, trozos escogidos de sus mejores composiciones, de las composiciones que les han valido tanto y tan justo renombre.' Federico Gamboa, *Impresiones y recuerdos* (Buenos Aires: Librería Europea, 1893), 106.

²⁴ Luis G. Iza, 'Revista de la semana,' *La patria*, 27 August 1882, 1.

paces, followed by the zarzuela *La gallina ciega* by Manuel Fernández Caballero. Lazo also performed the tenor aria ‘Ah, sì, ben mio’ from Verdi’s *Il Trovatore*.²⁵ Another review, signed under the pseudonym *Juvenal* and written by Enrique Chávarri for *El Monitor Republicano*, praised Campa’s composition as one of the most distinguished musical moments of the evening. Chávarri described the young composer as ‘a person of rare gifts for the divine art’.²⁶ Notably, Chávarri made no mention of Castro or his piece. Although it remains unclear whether Campa was still enrolled at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria in 1882—or whether he had ever formally studied there—his involvement in the event suggests the presence of personal or artistic ties with the institution or its director, Alfonso Herrera, who was highly respected within Mexican scientific and intellectual circles. Such connections may help to explain Campa’s participation in this public celebration.

The following year, Campa and Castro took part in the commemoration of Mexico’s Independence 73rd anniversary—the most important secular national celebration, held annually between 15 and 16 September. The celebration began in the morning with a parade involving students from twelve national schools, including the Conservatoire of Music. The Zapadores military band led the procession at eleven o’clock, as students marched through the city centre towards the Teatro Hidalgo, each school represented by its own standard. The choice of venue was symbolically significant: the Liberal Party—then in power—held Miguel Hidalgo, officially known as the *Padre de la patria* (Father of the Nation), as a central figure of republican values and national independence. At the Teatro Hidalgo, a literary and musical programme opened with a tribute to Hidalgo’s bust and a performance of the national anthem, followed by twenty-one items alternating between musical works and recitations. Among the performances were four pieces by the orchestra of the National School for the Blind, and three by the National Conservatoire’s orchestra: a *Marcha patriótica* (Patriotic March) by Campa, a *Marcha a Hidalgo* (March to Hidalgo) by Castro, and the overture *La hija del rey* (The King’s Daughter) by Melesio Morales. According to the printed programme, both marches were composed specifically for this occasion. Campa and Castro, in their final year at the Conservatoire, conducted the performances of their own works.²⁷ A critic from the musical journal *El álbum musical*—and reproduced in the daily newspaper *El tiempo*—described Castro’s piece as one ‘[who] stands out for his clear-cut style and the fluidity of his melodic writing.’ Campa’s piece, in contrast, was praised for ‘the correct use of harmony and the variety of

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ ‘quien posee raras aptitudes para el divino arte’. Juvenal [Enrique Chavarri], ‘Charlas dominicales,’ *El monitor republicano*, 27 August 1882, 1.

²⁷ La Comisión, ‘La fiesta del 15 de septiembre,’ *El tiempo*, 14 September 1883, 3.

instrumental effects.’²⁸ Though brief, the critic’s comments reveal a deeper distinction: by associating Castro with melodic fluency and Campa with harmonic construction and orchestral colour, the writer was implicitly situating Campa within the Germanic tradition—distinct from the Italian model, which remained dominant in Mexico through its emphasis on lyrical melody. Furthermore, the critical reception reinforced the perception of both young composers as promising artists. A critic from *El nacional* noted: ‘Ricardo Castro and Gustavo Campa, successful pupils of the composition class, wrote two marches for orchestra and military band, revealing their good knowledge of the art of counterpoint, and which were deservedly applauded. These two young men have a great future.’²⁹ Given the scale of the event and the prominence of their contributions, it is likely that both composers gained considerable visibility in the public sphere—an impression further strengthened by their participation in the inauguration of the Biblioteca Nacional de México (National Library of Mexico) in February 1884.

Campa and Castro graduated in December 1883. By that time, they had already achieved a level of visibility uncommon among composers of their generation. In February 1884, their names appeared alongside those of respected Mexican composers in a catalogue listing works by both European and Mexican musicians available for purchase. The daily newspaper *El nacional* reproduced this list from the magazine *La aurora musical* (The Musical Dawn). The European section featured waltzes by Émile Waldteufel (1837–1915), melodies by Eugène Ketterer (1831–1870), polkas by Heiterer Muth, and compositions by Böhm, among others. Commenting on the list, the columnist of *El nacional* remarked ‘Not only foreign composers appear on it; Mexicans also occupy a distinguished place: Melesio Morales, Julio Ituarte, Miguel Planas, Pedro Inclán, Ricardo Castro, Gustavo Campa, [Cristóbal] Reyes, [Ignacio] Cázares, Iriarte, and other esteemed Mexican authors fill the pages of that notable musical album with their compositions.’³⁰ This mention is not merely anecdotal. In a cultural context shaped by discourses of civilisation and aesthetic hierarchy, appearing alongside established European composers was a significant marker of prestige. For Mexican composers, such recognition offered symbolic validation within an artistic system that still perceived Europe as the centre of

²⁸ On Castro’s *Marcha a Hidalgo*: ‘se distingue por su corte franco y la fluidez del dibujo melódico’. On Campa’s *Marcha patriótica*: ‘por la corrección de la armonía y la variedad de los efectos instrumentales.’ ‘Juventud artística mexicana,’ *El tiempo*, 1 October 1883, 2.

²⁹ ‘Ricardo Castro y Gustavo Campa, aprovechados discípulos de la clase de composición, escribieron profesamente dos marchas para orquesta y banda militar, en que revelaron sus buenos conocimientos en el arte del contrapunto y que fueron justamente aplaudidos. Estos dos jóvenes son de gran porvenir,’ ‘Los alumnos del Conservatorio,’ *El nacional*, 18 September 1883, 2.

³⁰ ‘Y no tan solo los autores extranjeros figuran en ella, los mexicanos también ocupan un lugar distinguido: Melesio Morales, Julio Ituarte, Miguel Planas, Pedro Inclán, Ricardo Castro, Gustavo Campa, [Cristóbal] Reyes, [Ignacio] Cázares, Iriarte y otros estimados autores mexicanos ilustran con sus composiciones las páginas de ese notable album musical.’ ‘La aurora musical,’ *El nacional*, 19 February 1884, 2.

musical authority. That Campa and Castro were included among the most visible figures of Mexican musical life in 1884 reveals the extent to which they were becoming part of the cultural elite, even before consolidating their public identities as reformists, especially Campa.

The 1884 inauguration of the National Library became a symbolic gathering point for state power and intellectual authority alike. Directed by the esteemed intellectual José María Vigil Orozco (1829–1909),³¹ the ceremony combined musical and literary contributions by Mexican artists. It opened with the overture *La hija del rey* (*The King's Daughter*) by Melesio Morales, previously performed during the celebrations of Mexico's Independence the previous year. Other well-known pieces included *Marcha solemne* (*Solemn March*) by Castro, and Campa's earlier *Marcha patriótica* (*Patriotic March*). Among the new compositions written especially for the occasion was *Himno sinfónico* (*Symphonic Hymn*) for orchestra and military wind band by Campa.³² The works were performed by musicians and teachers from the National Conservatoire,³³ revealing that the National Conservatoire reaffirmed its role as the musical arm of a state-sponsored cultural institution.

In the memoirs of the inauguration, Vigil praised the central role of music in the civic celebration:

As can be seen from the above, music played a highly significant role in the celebration. It was indeed a happy idea to make the inauguration of the National Library also a manifestation of the level at which the divine art stands in Mexico; and that manifestation, it must be said, could justly—without exaggeration—be described as splendid, not only for the orchestra's performance, but also for the merit of the works performed, all of them composed by Mexican artists.³⁴

He then turned to the composers themselves. While Morales's reputation was already well established—requiring no further elaboration—Vigil focused instead on the rising prominence of Castro and Campa, noting that their talent and originality had captured the attention of Mexican society:

³¹ Miguel Ángel de Castro, 'Introducción. El legado de José María Vigil,' in *José María Vigil: a cien años de su muerte*, ed. Miguel Ángel de Castro (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas, 2018), 20. Castro described Vigil senior as 'journalist, poet, playwright, historian, translator, essayist, lecturer and bibliographer.' *Ibid.*, 9.

³² Dedicated to the Library's director, José María Vigil, the *Himno Sinfónico* was arranged for piano four hands by Ricardo Castro in the official memoirs of the National Library's inauguration. See: *Inauguración de la Biblioteca Nacional de México. Abril 2 de 1884* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Ireneo Paz, 1884). Included at the end of the volume, n/p.

³³ 'Inauguración,' *El siglo diez y nueve*, 2 April 1884, 3.

³⁴ 'Se ve por lo que procede la importancia que cupo en la fiesta a la parte musical. Túvose en efecto la feliz idea de que la inauguración de la Biblioteca Nacional fuese al mismo tiempo manifestación de la altura a que en México se halla el divino arte; y esa manifestación, justo es decirlo, pudo sin hipérbole ser calificada de espléndida, no sólo por la ejecución de la orquesta, sino por el mérito de las obras ejecutadas, producciones todas de artistas mexicanos' *Inauguración de la Biblioteca Nacional de México...*, vi.

Chapter 2

As for Castro and Campa, barely on the threshold of youth, they have already succeeded in attracting the attention of Mexican society through the talent, inspiration, and deep musical knowledge that shine through their work. Well-versed in the secrets of the art, in the study of the great masters, and in the bold innovations of modern genius that has opened up limitless horizons, one nonetheless perceives in both their compositions a distinctive originality—an unmistakable sign that the sacred fire that shapes true artists burns within them.³⁵

For Campa, the performance of two original works in such a prestigious venue marked a significant milestone. This assessment not only reinforced his public image as a serious composer rooted in the Romantic ideal, but also positioned him as a prominent representative of Mexico's artistic future.

Nonetheless, the press failed to acknowledge the significance of the musical programme—or Campa's role within it. Despite being presented in official documents as a solemn and historic occasion, the 1884 inauguration of the National Library received minimal attention in the contemporary press. This discrepancy is telling: contrary to Vigil's account, the silence surrounding the music suggests a disconnect between the government's symbolic ambitions and the event's actual cultural resonance. However, Campa used Vigil's chronicle to shape his own public image on an international scale (explored further in chapter 3). In 1888, he sent the published volume of the inauguration to the Spanish composer Felipe Pedrell, a gesture that, as we will see, had lasting consequences for how Campa positioned himself within transatlantic networks of musical authority.

In summary, the previous examples illustrate Campa's involvement in civic events and demonstrate that, by 1884, he had attained considerable public visibility as a composer. Given the nature of these occasions, it is plausible that the music performed was designed to be accessible and easily appreciated by the general public—conditions that may have restricted Campa from displaying the harmonic sophistication and interest in instrumental genres that characterised his more ambitious works, and which distinguished him from the Italianate tendencies prevalent among many of his contemporaries.³⁶ Nevertheless, two aspects of these events are especially significant. First, they reflect the early visibility Campa achieved by appearing alongside prominent figures such as Alfonso Herrera, director of the Escuela

³⁵ 'En cuanto a Castro y Campa, apenas en los umbrales de la juventud, han logrado atraerse la atención de la sociedad mexicana por el talento, la inspiración y los profundos conocimientos musicales que brillan en sus trabajos. Familiarizados con los secretos del arte, con el estudio de los grandes maestros, con las atrevidas innovaciones del genio moderno, que ha venido a abrir ilimitados horizontes, nótese sin embargo, un carácter de originalidad en las composiciones de ambos, signo seguro de que en ellos arde el fuego sagrado que forma a los verdaderos artistas.' *Ibid.*, vii.

³⁶ Campa had composed other musical works as well. On 12 November 1883, his *Funeral March* was performed during the *Velada Fúnebre* held in honour of renowned soprano Ángela Peralta, a former member of the Mexican Philharmonic Society. Other pieces by Campa from this period include the *Mélodie pour violon et orchestre* and an *Ave Maria*.

Nacional Preparatoria (National Preparatory School); participating in national commemorations such as the Independence Day celebrations; and contributing to the inauguration of the National Library, where he stood alongside his teacher, the renowned composer Melesio Morales, and the distinguished intellectual José María Vigil. The ceremony also brought together leading members of the state, including President Manuel González, members of his cabinet and directors of the National schools. Second, critics' remarks consolidated Campa's public image as a harmonist—a composer of technical skill and intellectual depth. This image was largely discursive, a progressive label that Campa himself sought to cultivate in order to set himself apart from the prevailing musical taste of the time. The same commentary also cast him as a 'priest of the divine art,' a Romantic archetype that applied not only to Campa but also to Castro. It is important to maintain the link between the two composers, as their shared Romantic and reformist profiles position them within the circle of young artists and aesthetic motivations that will be examined in the second part of this chapter.

Campa as Wagner the Music Critic

The second reason why Campa was known as 'the Mexican Wagner' lies in his combative role as a music critic. A critic from *El diario del hogar* observed that, 'despite his young age, his service record in the divine art corresponds to that of an old veteran of music.'³⁷ Such praise underscored the authority that Campa was beginning to command in Mexico City's musical life—an authority he extended beyond composition into his emerging role as a critic. Campa began writing music criticism in 1883 with an essay on *Carmen* by Georges Bizet. In it, he combined musical analysis with broader reflections on modernity—a thematic concern he would pursue in later pieces, such as his study of *Il Guarany* by Carlos Gomes. However, it was in 1884 that Campa's articles took on an increasingly polemical tone, reflecting his growing commitment to structural reform in Mexico's cultural life. Through these writings, he positioned himself as a Romantic reformer—an idealistic figure akin to the Wagner portrayed in contemporary European narratives.

Campa's writings belong to a tradition he termed *crítica artística*, a mode of criticism that valued aesthetic judgement as both an intellectual and moral pursuit. This tradition had roots in the Enlightenment distinction between the *connoisseur* and the *dilettante*, where the former possessed refined, cultivated taste shaped by education and philosophical reflection. By the nineteenth century, the *connoisseur's* opinion was regarded as a higher form of knowledge, guiding the broader public's sensibility—especially in the case of the Romantic artist, who came

³⁷ '[A] su temprana edad su hoja de servicios en el divino arte corresponde al de un viejo veterano de la música.' 'Un acontecimiento musical,' *El diario del hogar*, 7 August 1885, 3.

to be seen as a moral guide. Figures such as Hector Berlioz and Robert Schumann helped shape this model: Berlioz wrote with scathing wit about the incompetence of critics and musicians, while Schumann created fictional *Davidsbündler* to battle the *philistines* of the German music world. Across Europe, composer-critics emerged as public intellectuals, exploring questions of nationalism, musical language, and the role of virtuosity.³⁸ Campa was deeply influenced by this model. Like his European counterparts, he believed that music criticism could educate public taste, and he viewed his own writing as a tool to elevate Mexican society both aesthetically and morally.

In 1884, Campa reported on a philanthropic vocal and instrumental concert held at the Tívoli de San Cosme salon. The event brought together prominent musicians—including Campa’s piano teacher Julio Ituarte, soprano Rosa Palacios, tenor Adrián Guichenné and his father, the cellist Gustavo Guichenné, Cuban violinist Antonio Figueroa, a flautist named Meerts, and pianist Lubert—offering a diverse programme of thirteen works. While the vocal repertoire included arias from French *opéra-comique* and Italian *opera seria*, Campa paid closer attention to the instrumental works, which featured fantasias on operatic themes, especially the violin elegies performed by Figueroa. He praised the predominance of instrumental music—a rare occurrence in Mexican concerts of the time (see Appendix A.1 for the concert programme).³⁹

The Tívoli concert became the foundation for a broader critique. Campa argued that concert culture in Mexico was practically non-existent due to the public’s ignorance of modern music, which he saw as directly hindering the country’s civilising progress. He lamented the repetition of the same ‘superficial and outdated’ salon pieces and called for a repertoire that would educate public taste and contribute to national advancement. Campa appealed to his readers’ national pride by encouraging them to reflect on the benefits that such reform could bring to Mexico, which he described as ‘a people who, like ours, aspires to rise to the level of the most civilised nations.’⁴⁰

To reinforce his argument, Campa quoted the Francophone conductor and critic Eusèbe Lucas, using his words to underscore the grim consequences of rejecting elevated forms of art:

One must pity those who do not understand the evolution of modern art. The true moral meaning of the work being carried out in the aesthetic domain is utterly unknown to them; they are condemned to the miserable game of empty and powerless formulas, to

³⁸ For a summary of the history of music criticism, see: Muñoz Salazar, “*La crítica artística*,” 13–39.

³⁹ Gustavo E. Campa, ‘Una fiesta musical,’ *La patria*, 21 October 1884, 2.

⁴⁰ ‘en un pueblo que como el nuestro tiende a nivelarse con los más civilizados’ *Ibid.*

Chapter 2

the exclusive—and therefore sterile—worship of the past, or to those even more sterile trivialities that leave nothing behind, neither in spirit nor in heart.⁴¹

In *Les concerts classiques en France* (1876), Lucas denounced the ‘poor state’ of French musical culture—particularly in provincial areas. He attributed this decline to the trivialisation of public taste and widespread prejudices that obstructed the development of art music. Lucas championed the importance of symphonic and ‘serious’ music—by which he meant music that expressed profound ideas, genuine emotion, and elevated aesthetic values. He also challenged the rigid academic understanding of ‘classical’ music, advocating instead for a broader, more inclusive definition. In his view, the goal of classical concerts was to re-educate public sensibility, fostering appreciation for refined musical expression.

The passage cited by Campa appears at the end of Lucas’s third chapter, where the author laments the French public’s incapacity to grasp or appreciate symphonic music due to poor education, entrenched prejudices, and the distractions of fashion and entertainment. In that section, Lucas writes:

We must pity those who do not understand this evolution of modern art in a society that has been shaken and reshaped even in its depths. The true moral sense of the work being accomplished in the aesthetic sphere entirely escapes them; they are condemned to the miserable game of hollow and powerless formulas, to the exclusive—and thus sterile—worship of the past, or to those even more sterile trivialities that leave nothing behind, neither in the mind nor in the heart. There will never be enough men who, like Berlioz, will fight to free music from all that diminishes it by narrowing its scope.⁴²

Lucas’s commentary on French society resonated strongly with Campa, who interpreted it as an indictment of peripheral societies—like Mexico—that lacked the institutional maturity needed to sustain musical progress. Lucas had lamented the loss of institutions like the Conservatoire and the popular concerts of Padeloup and Lamoureux; Campa saw in this an analogy to Mexico’s own deficits.

In keeping with this outlook, Campa praised works like Henryk Wieniawski’s *Élégie*, performed by Antonio Figueroa, for introducing Mexican audiences to elevated and introspective genres rarely heard in local concerts. He believed that such music—demanding,

⁴¹ ‘Preciso es compadecer a los que no comprenden la evolución del arte moderno. El verdadero sentido moral del trabajo que se realiza en el orden estético, les es absolutamente desconocido, están condenados al juego miserable de fórmulas vacías e impotentes, al culto exclusivo y por lo mismo estéril del pasado, o bien a esas puerilidades más estériles aún, que no dejan nada, ni en espíritu ni en corazón.’ *Ibid.*

⁴² ‘Il faut plaindre ceux qui ne comprennent pas cette évolution de l’art moderne //54// dans une société ébranlée et remaniée elle-même jusque dans ses profondeurs. Le vrai sens moral du travail qui s’accomplit dans l’ordre esthétique leur échappe absolument, ils sont condamnés au jeu misérable de formules creuses et impuissantes, au culte exclusif, et partant stérile, du passé, ou bien à ces puerilités plus stériles, du passé, ou bien à ces puerilités plus stériles encore qui ne laissent rien ni dans l’esprit ni dans le cœur.’ Lucas, *Les concerts classiques en France*, 53–54.

expressive, and technically sophisticated—could refine public taste. Campa observed with optimism that the audience was genuinely eager to hear these pieces:

Mr. Figueroa was to perform three pieces from the most select part of his repertoire. The very idea of hearing him tackle works as difficult to interpret as those by Wieniawski had the audience in eager anticipation—and rightly so, for such pieces are the touchstone of the most renowned violinists.⁴³

As previously noted, Campa celebrated the progressive nature of the Tívoli programme. It was a typical nineteenth-century miscellanea, yet instrumental music prevailed over vocal selections—marking a shift in local programming. The concert included arrangements for strings and wind instruments, rather than relying solely on piano or voice, and many of the pieces were adaptations of operatic or vocal works. Campa's preference for this type of music suggests his advocacy for what he regarded as 'absolute music'—instrumental works conceived independently of text or narrative.

Ultimately, Campa called for the formation of a concert society that would elevate Mexico's musical culture. He believed that the efforts displayed at the Tívoli, though promising, were insufficient. Mexico required a committed body of musicians to perform modern, refined repertoire and educate public taste.⁴⁴ Campa modelled his vision on institutions like the French *Concerts Populaires de Musique Classique* founded by Jules-Étienne Padeloup in 1861. He explicitly argued that the Mexican concert society should be 'analogous in its principles to the celebrated society of Padeloup, which rendered such valuable service to French art, contributing more than any other to the popularisation of the classical works of the great masters.'⁴⁵ At the same time, Campa's encouragement to create a concert series based on the symphonic orchestra model brings into the front the idea showcase by Simon McVeigh on the fact that this model was a 'so fragile' concept in the nineteenth century.⁴⁶

Through his criticism, Campa positioned himself not merely as an observer of Mexico's musical limitations, but as a reformer committed to a broader civilising mission. His call for a concert society, modelled on Padeloup's French initiative, reflects a dual aspiration: to

⁴³ 'el Sr. Figueroa ejecutaría tres piezas de lo más selecto de su repertorio: la idea sola de poderle escuchar en el desempeño de obras tan difíciles de interpretar como lo son las de Wienawsky, traía ansiosa a la concurrencia, y con justicia a fe, porque ellas son la piedra de toque de los más afamados violinistas.' Gustavo E. Campa, 'Una fiesta musical,' *La patria*, 21 October 1884, 2.

⁴⁴ The historiography of late nineteenth century Mexico has focused on the Sociedad Anónima de Conciertos, created in 1892 and to which Campa was a member. The group was presented as the champion of instrumental, modern and *elevated* music. Nonetheless, Campa's writings shows that the intention was stated years before.

⁴⁵ Gustavo E. Campa, 'Una fiesta musical,' *La patria*, 21 October 1884, 2.

⁴⁶ Simon McVeigh, 'The Concert Series,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Intellectual Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Paul Watt, Sarah Collins, and Michael Allis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 293–316.

cultivate aesthetic discernment among Mexican audiences and to build the institutional foundations necessary for a modern musical culture. In this vision, music criticism became both a pedagogical tool and a vehicle for social transformation—an instrument through which art could contribute to the moral and intellectual refinement of the nation. Campa thus joined his European counterparts not only in style but in purpose, embodying the Romantic ideal of the artist as cultural guide while adapting it to the challenges of a peripheral society. In this sense, the figure of ‘the Mexican Wagner’ transcended compositional influence to encompass a broader ethos of artistic intervention—one that sought to harmonise national aspiration with cosmopolitan models of cultural progress.

In summary, the label ‘the Mexican Wagner’ encapsulated a complex interplay between Campa’s aesthetic orientation, his polemical authority as a critic, and the aspirations of a generation seeking to modernise Mexican musical culture. While its initial circulation reflected a desire to associate Campa with the prestige of European modernism, the label also responded to projected features of his compositional identity—particularly an idealised engagement with chromatic harmony, formal experimentation, and the ambition to elevate national taste through, chamber music, symphonic and operatic forms. These traits, more consistently articulated in his critical writings than realised in his surviving compositions, reflect not so much a technical equivalence with Wagner as a discursive construction—one shaped by Campa’s Romantic self-fashioning and the broader symbolic currency that Wagner held in fin-de-siècle Mexico.

As such, the epithet ‘el Wagner mexicano’ functioned less as a descriptive category than as a cultural signifier. It helped position Campa within a transnational horizon of artistic reform, enabling his contemporaries to imagine a place for Mexico in the narrative of musical modernity. Through his music and especially through his writings, Campa performed the role of a reformist intellectual—someone who, like Wagner, believed in art’s capacity to civilise, elevate, and transform society.

The Progressive Mexican *Davidsbündler* (1885–1886)

The Monday Soirée Group (1885)

Around 1885, Gustavo Campa became a regular participant in the Monday evening *tertulias* (soirées) hosted by Fanny Natali, better known by her nom de plume *Titania*. She was an Irish opera singer who had settled in Mexico City with her husband, the tenor Enrico Testa and her children. Natali took residence at the elegant Hotel Iturbide, while she worked as a singing teacher and wrote for local newspapers. Her cultural columns—on fashion, music, and

society—earned her considerable influence among the capital’s elites. But Natali was more than a chronicler of high society: she was a well-informed, intellectually curious woman with clear positions on the modern arts.⁴⁷ Campa, for his part, regarded her with profound admiration and respect.

The cosmopolitan atmosphere of Natali’s salon is vividly captured in the memoirs of writer Federico Gamboa (1864–1939), who offers rare testimony of the setting in which young musicians like Campa developed. Gamboa describes the soirées as a meeting place for Mexico City’s artistic and intellectual elite, where one might encounter members of the aristocracy, cultural journalists, and men of letters. Among them, Gamboa highlights the presence of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (1834–1893), a key figure of Mexican nationalism and Germanophile literary taste⁴⁸—both central to Campa’s intellectual formation. According to Gamboa, in the salon ‘the artistic element prevailed; the opera divas, Mexican singers, two of our great musicians: Gustavo Campa and Ricardo Castro; two of our prima donnas, Soledad Goyzueta and Rosa Palacios, recently returned from Rome [gathered together]’.⁴⁹ In another passage, Gamboa recalls how Campa and Castro would take turns at the piano, performing their own compositions, while the young tenor José ‘Pepe’ Vigil—son of the National Library director José María Vigil—sang for the guests.

⁴⁷ After retiring from the stage in 1881, Natali established herself as a professional journalist in the Mexican cultural press. Writing under the pseudonym *Titania*, she contributed chronicles on music, theatre, fashion, and social life to several periodicals. She initially collaborated with daily newspapers in Mexico City, producing translations, fashion pieces, and theatre reports, and later wrote for other publications. She also addressed progressive subjects such as developments in women’s education in the United States. Her work further appeared in women’s magazines such as *Las hijas del Anáhuac* and *Las violetas del Anáhuac*, where she collaborated with other female writers, both Mexican and foreign. For the expansion of female journalism in Mexico City, see Molina Díaz, *Ser mujer y escribir de música*, 121. For the discussion of women’s education in the United States, see Michelle Lira, *Tradition vs Progress in a Mexican Context: The Evolving Roles of Women during the Porfiriato in the Nineteenth Century* (master’s thesis, San Diego State University, 2021), 95–96. For Natali’s participation in women’s magazines, see Lira, *ibid.*, 51–53; Fernando Ibarra Chávez, ‘*Violetas del Anáhuac* (1887–1889) y *Revista Nacional de Letras y Ciencias* (1889–1890): dos eslabones más para comprender la prensa literaria decimonónica,’ in *La modernidad literaria: creación, publicaciones periódicas y lectores en el Porfiriato (1876–1911)*, ed. Ana Laura Zavala and Belem Clark de Lara (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, 2020), 47–52; Molina Díaz, *ibid.*, 97–100.

⁴⁸ Once member of the Mexican Philharmonic Society and champion of Melesio Morales, Altamirano advocated for a change of cultural models. Berenice Ramírez Lago mentions that ‘En la década de 1870, el gusto musical en México buscaba otras fuentes de inspiración, como consecuencia de la Intervención Francesa y el triunfo republicano. En el ámbito literario, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano recomendaba en 1869 en su primera crónica del periódico *El renacimiento*, que los artistas podían seguir la influencia cultural de Inglaterra y de Alemania y ya no la de Francia exclusivamente.’ Berenice Ramírez Lago, ‘*Gran concierto vocal, instrumental y de orfeonismo para la noche de este viernes:” la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana como promotora de conciertos, Ciudad de México, 1866–1877* (Master’s Thesis, Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 2022), 133–134.

⁴⁹ ‘Pero sobre todo, dominaba el elemento artístico; iban las divas de la ópera, cantantes mexicanos, dos de nuestros grandes músicos Gustavo Campa y Ricardo Castro; dos de nuestras *primadonnas* [sic], Soledad Goyzueta y Rosa Palacios, recién llegada de Roma’. Gamboa, *Impresiones y recuerdos*, 98.

Natali's influence extended beyond local circles. Her soirées were visited by internationally renowned singers, creating opportunities for young Mexican musicians to encounter the global stars of their time. Gamboa provides colourful vignettes of these encounters:

One night, I saw Luisa Théo there, just before her benefit concert, while Fanny was teaching her the Mexican song *El palomito*; [...] There, [Anne] Judic held us in rapture with her witty, anecdotal chatter [...] There, Clementina de Vère nearly fell for a rich Mexican baritone, an amateur and a romantic. There, Adela Gini told me all about the poetic Venetian custom of feeding thousands of pigeons in St. Mark's Square [...] but while she spoke, from the next room, the tenor Pizzorni—who would later become her husband—couldn't take his eyes off her [...] There, Adelina Patti, with the manners of a grand lady, Andalusian eyes, and the bearing of a queen, sang for us, turned slightly away, her famous waltz *Il bacio*.⁵⁰

These literary snapshots offer more than charm or nostalgia. They reveal the social networks in which Campa moved and the cultural aspirations that shaped his generation. The refinement of the *tertulias*—their blend of cosmopolitan sociability, musical performance, and reverence for high culture—reflected the ambitions of an emerging artistic elite that saw in Art a vehicle for civilisation, modernity, and spiritual elevation. Like Campa, many of these young artists aspired to universal education, cultivated taste, and what they perceived as the moral mission of the modern artist.

As we shall see, the visibility of these musicians owed much to their talent, but also to the strategic support of critics like Natali, Gamboa, and Félix M. Alcérreca (writing as *Orlando Kador*) in the influential dailies *El diario del hogar* and *La patria*. These cultural intermediaries helped construct an image of the young musicians as visionary reformers—figures whose ideals closely mirrored those of Robert Schumann's *Davidsbündler*, the fictional brotherhood of progressive musicians who fought against philistinism in the name of artistic truth. In this light, Campa and his circle can be seen not merely as performers, but as protagonists of a Mexican variant of that European Romantic ideal: committed to musical modernity, moral refinement, and the shared dream of a higher cultural life.

⁵⁰ 'Allí vi una noche a Luisa Théo, poco antes de su beneficio cuando Fanny le enseñaba la canción mexicana de *El palomito*; [...] Allí, la Judic, nos tuvo embelesados con su charla espiritual y anecdótica [...] Allí Clementina de Vére, por poco no se enamora de un barítono aficionado, mexicano y rico. Allí Adela Gini, me informó de la poética costumbre veneciana de dar de comer a miles de palomas en la plaza de San Marcos [...] pero mientras la Gini me contaba esto, desde la otra habitación el tenor Pizzorni, que fue luego su marido, no le apartaba la vista, [...] Allí Adelina Patti, con sus modales de gran dama, sus ojos de andaluza, su conjunto de reina, cantó vuelta a nosotros, su célebre valse del Bacio.' *Ibid.*, 101–102. French singers Louise Théo, Anne Judic and Clementine de Vére performed in Mexico with opéra-comique companies between 1883 and 1885. Adelina Gini, Carlo Pizzorni and renowned Adelina Patti travelled with Napoleón Sieni's Italian opera company after 1883.

Campa's activity as both composer and performer in 1885 unfolded alongside a circle of fellow young musicians who began gaining prominence within the capital's cultural elite. This collective began to attract public attention in the press, as evidenced by a review in *El diario del hogar*, the same outlet where Campa was labelled as 'the Mexican Wagner'. The review, published on 7 August 1885, referred to a benefit concert held two days earlier for the German violinist Teodoro Curant at the salon of Gante Street. The author described the concert as a 'select' event, gathering the most distinguished members of Mexico's artistic youth. As the critic wrote: 'For the past eight days, announcements had been circulating, promising a gathering of the finest, the *crème de la crème* of our artists.'⁵¹ Among those praised were soprano Rosa Palacios—described as 'the pearl of our lyric artists'—as well as pianists and composers Gustavo Campa and Ricardo Castro. The programme also featured Felipe Villanueva on piano, violinists Pedro Manzano and Gabriel Unda, and cellists Manuel Peralta and Luis David. Moreover, members of the German settlement like the *Orfeón Alemán* (German male choir) also participated in the musical events.⁵² The reviewer closed with admiration for the musicians' shared youth and high calibre: 'As you can see, the group of artists belonging to the new generation could not be more select.'⁵³ Although the author of the review remains anonymous, it is plausible that it was Federico Gamboa himself, who had connections to many of the featured performers and wrote cultural criticism during this period.

This moment marked a visible emergence of a progressive cohort of musicians within public discourse—many of whom had studied together at the National Conservatoire and were now asserting their presence on prominent stages. Yet for some, like Campa, this public visibility also coincided with an increasing distance—and ultimately, a rupture—with the Conservatoire itself. This distancing was not merely logistical, but ideological, laying the groundwork for the more militant stance that would take shape the following year. While Campa's earlier calls for the foundation of a permanent concert society had yet to yield institutional results, the young musicians surrounding him began embodying the ideals he espoused in print: artistic excellence, instrumental sophistication, and the performance of 'elevated' music.

For Campa, the concert societies of Jules Padeloup in Paris remained an aspirational model. As discussed in previous sections, Padeloup's popular concerts were intended to

⁵¹ 'Desde hace ocho días circularon unos avisos anunciando la reunión de lo más granado, la goma de nuestros artistas.' 'Un acontecimiento musical,' *El diario del hogar*, 7 August 1885, 3.

⁵² This was the successor of the *Club alemán* conducted by Teodoro Leede and which took part in the concerts of the Mexican Philharmonic Society in 1866 and 1867.

⁵³ 'Como se ve, el grupo de artistas que pertenecen a la nueva generación, no podía ser más selecto.' 'Un acontecimiento musical,' *El diario del hogar*, 7 August 1885, 3.

democratise orchestral music, initially through French works by Gounod, Saint-Saëns, and Berlioz, though—as Simon Trezise has noted—the core of the repertoire eventually gravitated toward the German symphonic canon. By the 1880s, two new French concert societies had emerged as more progressive alternatives: Édouard Colonne’s orchestra, known for championing Berlioz, and Charles Lamoureux’s ensemble, which became a major force behind the promotion of Wagner in France.⁵⁴ In Mexico, however, such orchestral infrastructure remained fragile. As noted earlier, symphonic music had long been marginal in public programmes, which were dominated by vocal repertoire. In 1866, the conductor Julio Clément had already petitioned the MPS to invest in instrumental education and to fulfil its own regulations mandating the inclusion of symphonic works—even in piano reductions. Yet Clément lamented the Society’s disproportionate focus on vocal training at the expense of orchestral development.

Nonetheless, between August 1885 and February 1886, press accounts reveal that Campa and his colleagues began organising performances that prominently featured instrumental works—particularly German pieces associated with musical ‘elevation’. This transitional moment, bridging performance and ideology, serves as a case study to examine the cultural meanings and critical narratives attached to ‘serious’ music in late nineteenth-century Mexico, and the role that harmonic, instrumental repertoire played in the dissemination of European musical ideals.

Performing High-Art Repertoire for Social Elevation (1885–1886)

Between August 1885 and February 1886, a series of six vocal and instrumental benefit concerts were held at the salon on Gante Street, each involving musicians close to Campa and loosely connected by shared ideals rather than institutional affiliation. These events included the debut of the German violinist Teodoro Curant, a concert for the Italian tenor Giuseppe Annovazzi, a charity performance for the poor, the farewell concert of soprano Rosa Palacios, who was departing for Europe, Ricardo Castro’s own farewell, ahead of his journey abroad, and Curant’s second benefit concert. Despite being organized independently, these concerts shared several traits: they were all charitable in nature (five were centred around individual beneficiaries), and they allowed performers to shape the programme according to their artistic goals and personal networks. The repertoire consisted largely of European works, with only a few Mexican compositions—exclusively by Campa, Castro and Villanueva—appearing on the programmes,

⁵⁴ Simon Trezise, ‘Renaissance and Change, 1848 to the Death of Debussy,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to French Music*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 136.

reflecting both their aesthetic preferences and a subtle form of self-promotion (See Appendices A.2–A.7 for the respective concert programmes).

While these events did not form an official concert series, they revealed the initiative of a cohort of musicians who operated outside institutional structures. Their status as benefit concerts suggests that performers had greater autonomy in programming choices, independent from the official taste of the National Conservatoire or other formal entities. The beneficiaries themselves likely influenced the repertoire. Annovazzi and Palacios’s concerts featured predominantly lyrical works and included multiple singers, while those for Curant and Castro focused more on instrumental virtuosity. Notably, vocal programmes often included Italian opera seria, romanzas, and excerpts from French *opéra-comique*—genres still dominant in Mexican public taste. This contrast invites reflection: while instrumentalists, following Campa’s aesthetic ideals, gradually shifted toward a more ‘serious’ or ‘modern’ repertoire, singers largely maintained the conventions of popular lyricism. In this context, the concerts reflected a transitional moment in Mexico’s musical public sphere, where autonomy from institutional constraints allowed musicians to test aesthetic boundaries—even if that experimentation was more evident among instrumentalists than singers.

	Name of concert	Date
1.	German violinist Teodoro Curant’s vocal and instrumental benefit concert	5 August 1885
2.	Italian tenor Giuseppe Annovazzi’s vocal and instrumental benefit concert	28 August 1885
3.	Vocal and instrumental benefit concert for the poor	30 October 1885
4.	Rosa Palacios’s farewell benefit concert	23 November 1885
5.	Ricardo Castro’s farewell benefit concert	26 December 1885
6.	Teodoro Curant’s second benefit concert	3 February 1886

Table 1. Chronological List of Concerts, August 1885–February 1886.

Campa and his circle’s programming of *música elevada* brings into focus the nineteenth-century ideal of ‘high culture,’ a cosmopolitan project deeply rooted in European bourgeois aesthetics. These concert practices sought to reframe musical performance as an intellectual activity—on par with literature, philosophy, or the visual arts—through the regular presentation of complex instrumental works by ‘serious’ composers, particularly from the Germanic tradition. As Simon McVeigh has noted, such initiatives aimed to elevate music above mere entertainment and align it with the aesthetic and moral aspirations of the modern bourgeois public. In contrast to the popular appeal of vocal virtuosity and Italian opera, this shift

represented an intentional effort to cultivate more introspective, informed listening practices.⁵⁵ Moreover, the contrast with the popularity of Italian vocal music in Mexico highlights the cultural ambition embedded in Campa's project—one that sought to reframe musical taste by aligning it with dominant ideals of civilisation and modernity.

As discussed earlier, Campa and Castro composed marches and hymns between 1882 and 1884 for civic concerts, gaining visibility and the institutional endorsement of government bodies, as exemplified by the inauguration of the National Library. By that time, both composers had already produced works in other genres. Each wrote a *Funeral March*, performed during the memorial evening for the renowned soprano Ángela Peralta on 12 November 1883. Other works by Campa from this period include *Mélodie pour violon et orchestre* and an *Ave Maria*. The concerts held between 1885 and 1886 served as platforms for self-promotion, in which Campa, Castro, and their friend Felipe Villanueva showcased their own compositions. Data from these performances reveal that five of the six concerts featured chamber music, while only Ricardo Castro's benefit concert included an orchestra, which allowed for a more diverse selection of repertoire.

In concerts featuring smaller ensembles, Campa presented his *Gavotte in A minor* and a *Romance* for soprano and cello. Castro, for his part, performed a *Nocturne in B minor* and a *Polonaise in A major*, both for piano. The young Felipe Villanueva also presented two of his well-known *Mazurkas*, in A minor and D major respectively. Castro's farewell concert, which uniquely benefited from the presence of a symphonic orchestra, provided him with the opportunity to display his skills as a composer and virtuoso pianist. Among the more introspective works performed were his own *Dulce recuerdo: Romanza sin palabras* and *Ilusión*, both orchestrated by Campa. The programme also included Campa's *Hymn to the Night* for soloist, male chorus, and orchestra. As for larger-scale genres, Castro presented the *Allegro* movement from his *Piano Concerto in D minor*—a significant undertaking, especially considering the logistical and financial challenges associated with assembling an orchestra in Mexico at the time.

It is worth noting that no music by other Mexican composers was performed during these events. This strongly suggests that the concerts functioned as exclusive platforms intended to promote their own careers as professional musicians, placing themselves on equal footing with the European composers they admired—whether 'harmonists' and classics like Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Haydn, and Schubert, or more progressive figures such as Anton Rubinstein, Saint-Saëns, Scharwenka, and Wagner. Further reinforcing this ambition was the

⁵⁵ McVeigh, 'The Concert Series,' 293–294.

inclusion of a *Scena* and *Romance* from Campa's unfinished opera *Maria Tudor*, performed by soprano Rosa Palacios. Furthermore, these selections reflect more than mere self-promotion: they align with the broader discourse on *música elevada* developed throughout this chapter. The composers' choices reveal a deliberate effort to position their works within the aesthetic ideals of civilisation and cosmopolitanism—equivalents of high culture, intellectualised, Europeanised repertoire that was central to Mexico's musical modernity in the late nineteenth century.

Another central figure embodying this cosmopolitan ideal was Luis David, a cellist of German origin whose repertoire and performance choices reinforced the prominence of German music within Mexico City's evolving musical landscape. Introduced to the public through the press as early as 1883, he was the only recognised cello soloist in Mexico City at the time, with few others—such as Gustavo Guichenné and the young Manuel Peralta—dedicated primarily to chamber music. Concert programmes reveal that David's repertoire included works by Handel, Karl Davydov, David Popper, Philipp Scharwenka, Grieg, Campa, and Castro, as well as cello arrangements of pieces by Chopin, Schubert, and Wagner. His selections suggest a strong affiliation with the harmonic school and with German musical traditions that had not yet been assimilated into mainstream Mexican taste.

Although not a product of the National Conservatoire, David collaborated with several of its figures, including pianist Julio Ituarte, and maintained close ties with Campa, who dedicated works to him. His prominence, along with his repertoire, helped shape a new instrumental aesthetic within Mexico's concert life. David's commitment to German works not only exemplified the aesthetic values associated with 'high culture,' but also underscored a cultural distinction from prevailing local preferences, which tended to favour traditional Mexican and Italian vocal styles. His presence and programming illuminated the transnational dimension of Mexico's musical modernity, reflecting both the influence of European immigrant communities and the aspirations of Mexican musicians to align with broader, international artistic currents (as explored in Chapter One, where the German Male Choir took part in the concerts organized by the MPS).

While the repertoire performed by Campa, Castro, and Villanueva between 1885 and 1886 encompassed a range of genres—from mazurkas and dances to orchestral pieces and operatic excerpts (Table 2)—this diversity does not undermine their alignment with the ideals of *música elevada*. Rather, it reflects a broader strategy to frame varied musical forms within the aesthetic values associated with high art as a mode of cosmopolitan expression. These composers were demonstrating their ability to navigate multiple genres while asserting their artistic ambition.

Chapter 2

Campa's *Gavota*, for instance, evokes a Baroque dance form that had been revived and recontextualised in nineteenth-century Paris through the *concerts anciens*, suggesting a conscious engagement with historical styles. Villanueva's *Mazurkas* and Castro's *Nocturno* and *Polonesa* similarly conjure the refined intimacy of Chopin, bringing salon genres into the public sphere with elevated aesthetic intent. These works signal not only personal stylistic preferences but also strategies for repositioning familiar genres within new concert formats. Campa's contributions also included chamber music and works for choir and orchestra, showing that his advocacy for instrumental music did not exclude vocal forms. Most revealing is his *Scena y romanza* from the unfinished opera *Maria Tudor*. Though never completed, the opera project itself underscores the enduring prestige of the genre—long considered the ultimate test of compositional skill and a gateway to cultural legitimacy.

Date	Concert	Composer	Piece	Performer
5 Aug 1885	Teodoro Curant benefit	Gustavo Campa	Gavota in A minor (para piano a cuatro manos)	Gustavo Campa (piano), Ricardo Castro (piano)
5 Aug 1885	Teodoro Curant benefit	Ricardo Castro	Nocturno in B minor	Ricardo Castro (piano)
5 Aug 1885	Teodoro Curant benefit	Ricardo Castro	Polonesa in A major	Ricardo Castro (piano)
28 Oct 1885	Giuseppe Annovazzi benefit	Gustavo Campa	Gavota	Ricardo Castro (piano)
30 Oct 1885	Benefit for the Poor	Felipe Villanueva	Mazurka in A minor	Felipe Villanueva (piano)
30 Oct 1885	Benefit for the Poor	Felipe Villanueva	Mazurka in D major	Felipe Villanueva (piano)
30 Oct 1885	Benefit for the Poor	Gustavo Campa	Romanza para soprano con acompañamiento de piano y cello	Rosa Palacios (soprano), Luis David (cello), Gustavo E. Campa (piano)
23 Nov 1885	Rosa Palacios benefit	Gustavo Campa	Scena y romanza de la ópera María Tudor	Rosa Palacios (soprano)
26 Dec 1885	Ricardo Castro benefit	Ricardo Castro	Gran marcha solemne	Ricardo Castro (conductor), orchestra
26 Dec 1885	Ricardo Castro benefit	Gustavo Campa	Pastoral	Gustavo Campa (conductor) y orquesta
26 Dec 1885	Ricardo Castro benefit	Ricardo Castro	Dulce recuerdo: romanza sin palabras (orchestration, Campa)	Ricardo Castro (conductor), orchestra
26 Dec 1885	Ricardo Castro benefit	Ricardo Castro	Ilusión: romanza sin palabras	Ricardo Castro (conductor), orchestra

			(orchestration, Campa)	
26 Dec 1885	Ricardo Castro benefit	Gustavo Campa	Himno a la noche para solista, coro de hombres y orquesta	Virginia Galván (soprano), Orfeón Alemán (choir), Gustavo Campa (conductor), orchestra
26 Dec 1885	Ricardo Castro benefit	Ricardo Castro	Allegro del primer concierto en Re menor	Ricardo Castro (piano), Julio Ituarte (conductor), orchestra
26 Dec 1885	Ricardo Castro benefit	Ricardo Castro	¡No me caso! Danza cantada	Rosa Palacios (soprano), Julio Ituarte

Table 2: Compositions by Campa, Castro and Villanueva performed in 1885.

Importantly, most of these concerts took place in salons rather than major theatres, reinforcing their experimental and semi-private character. These were not grand public spectacles but curated spaces of aesthetic proposition, in which Campa, Castro, and Villanueva negotiated between inherited traditions, public taste, and the emerging standards of cosmopolitan modernity.

The spatial dimension of these performances further illuminates the transitional nature of both the repertoire and its audiences. Of the six concerts held between 1885 and 1886, only one—the 1885 benefit for Ricardo Castro—took place at the prestigious Teatro Nacional. The rest were hosted in more modest venues, including the salon of Gante street, the Sociedad Filarmónica y Dramática Francesa,⁵⁶ and the Tivoli de San Cosme salon (the site of the 1884 concert discussed earlier). These salons, all functioning as semi-private cultural spaces, were associated with upper-middle-class artistic circles and offered a more intimate, flexible setting for repertoire that diverged from mainstream operatic or popular tastes.

Rather than indicating a marginal position, these venues enabled composers such as Campa, Castro, and Villanueva to experiment with new aesthetic models and to build prestige through smaller, more controlled musical networks. The salon thus emerges not as a secondary or improvised alternative, but as a site of deliberate negotiation between artistic ambition, public visibility, and institutional independence. This idea of controlled networks and the experimental framing of progressive musical models will be further explored later in this chapter.

The inclusion of Wagner's music in these concerts—prior to February 1886—invites reflection on how these musicians conceptualised the German composer's work, particularly

⁵⁶ The salon of the French Society was used as a meeting place for different types of events, such as the society's own concerts and dances. At the same time, however, it was used for a variety of activities, as the society rented out its hall to other people and associations.

given Wagner's centrality to Campa's progressive musical agenda. The programmes indicate that Campa arranged three pieces from Wagner's catalogue:

Date	Concert	Piece	Performers
5 Aug 1885	Teodoro Curant benefit	<i>Albumblatt</i> (arr. Campa)	Luis David (cello solo), Teodoro Curant (violin?), Gabriel Unda y Galindo (violin), Pedro Manzano (viola?) Manuel Peralta (cello)
30 Oct 1885	Benefit for the Poor	<i>Träume</i> (arr. unknown)	David (cello), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
23 Nov 1885	Rosa Palacios farewell	<i>Albumblatt</i> (arr. Campa)	Luis David (cello solo), Teodoro Curant (violin?), Gabriel Unda y Galindo (violin), Pedro Manzano (viola?) Manuel Peralta (cello)
3 Feb 1886	Curant farewell	'O du mein holder Abendstern,' <i>Tannhäuser</i>	Curant (violin), Villanueva (piano)

Table 3: Pieces by Wagner Performed at the 1885–1886 Concerts.

These selections show two key points. First, although Campa vocally supported *modern opera* in his writings, in practice, what he and his circle introduced was a carefully selected set of Wagnerian excerpts—romantic, introspective, and adapted for small ensembles. At the time, boundaries between genres were blurred: opera arias and instrumental miniatures alike were framed as modern or serious, regardless of their original function or stylistic period. What mattered was the *authorial aura*—the genius associated with the composer's name. Second, this repertoire carried connotations of introspection and nocturnal affect—qualities often associated with the Germanic inner world, in contrast to the Latin exuberance of mainstream Mexican taste. The *Abendstern* aria and *Träume* exemplify this orientation.⁵⁷ Far from signalling a full embrace of Wagnerism (with its philosophical or *Gesamtkunstwerk* dimensions), these performances reflected an early phase of modernist engagement—tentative, exploratory, and situated more in symbolic value than in aesthetic radicalism. Not until 1889 would Mexican audiences hear the prelude to *Lohengrin* performed by the Conservatoire's concert society, and only in 1891—when Emma Juch's company performed *Die Walküre*—did Wagner's more radical musical language enter Mexico's operatic stage in full.

This period of vocal and instrumental concert activity culminated in a pivotal shift around 1886, when the performance of *música elevada* by Campa and his close circle had

⁵⁷ Some of these concerts related to the *Colonia alemana* (German settlement). Cellist Luis David was the son of German immigrants and violinist Teodoro Curant was a German passing through Mexico. For the Concert for the Benefit of Violinist Teodoro Curant, where *An Album Leaf* was performed, see: 'Gacetilla. Concierto,' *El siglo diez y nueve*, 27 August 1885, 3. For the Benefit Concert for the Poor where *Dreams* was performed, see: 'Gacetilla. Concierto vocal e instrumental,' *El diario del hogar*, 30 October 1885, 3. For the Rosa Palacios's Grand Vocal and Instrumental Concert (farewell concert) where *An Album Leaf* was performed, see: 'Gran concierto vocal e instrumental Rosa Palacios,' *El diario del hogar*, 19 November 1885, 3. For Teodoro Curant's Farewell Concert where 'The Evening Star' from *Tannhäuser* was performed, see: Titania [Fanny Natali], 'Ecos dominicales,' *La patria ilustrada*, no. 5 (1 February 1886): 2.

successfully asserted their cosmopolitan ambitions and outlined a progressive agenda they believed essential for Mexico City's musical future. The concerts—often framed as charitable events—allowed Campa to exert curatorial control, programming rarely performed or entirely new works within the capital. His ideal of 'harmonic' music was reinforced by the presence of German musicians such as violinist Teodoro Curant, cellist Luis David, and the Orfeón Alemán, linking this musical agenda to Mexico's German settlement and its networks.

The analysis of concert programmes further reveals the importance of space in shaping this aesthetic project. All performances—except one—took place in semi-private salons affiliated with institutions like the French Philharmonic Society or religious centres such as the Methodist Church. These venues, rentable and somewhat removed from mainstream operatic or theatrical circuits, offered an alternative infrastructure for composers to experiment and self-promote. In these salons, Campa, Castro, and Villanueva inserted their own music—often the only Mexican compositions on the programme—alongside European repertoire, thus staging themselves as professional composers fully conversant with both national and transnational artistic currents.

By early 1886, however, Campa's public musical activity began to shift direction. His name appears increasingly in relation to religious ceremonies, such as the annual funeral service for Teresa Mier de Fernández del Castillo held at the Templo de San Fernando. He seems to have withdrawn from secular concert life until June 1887, when he re-emerged in an ambitious vocal and instrumental programme that, for the first time, placed instrumental music at the centre. This hiatus coincides with a deepened investment in music education. Throughout 1886, Campa appears to have focused on founding a private music school aimed at reshaping public taste and training a new generation of 'progressive' musicians.

This educational initiative coincided with the return of his friend, flautist Juan Hernández Acevedo, from musical studies in Paris. Their collaboration would soon give birth to the Instituto Musical Campa-Hernández Acevedo. The arrival of Paris-trained musicians introduced new perspectives on music pedagogy and aesthetics—a topic that warrants deeper research in its own right. However, it is important to note that Hernández Acevedo, in particular, played a key role in fuelling Campa's critical engagement with the state-run National Conservatoire, which he viewed as a stronghold of dominant taste. At the same time, and as will be explored in the following section, *El diario del hogar* and *La patria* began to serve as platforms for an increasingly militant rhetoric in defence of progressive musical ideals—one that evoked a David-versus-Goliath struggle, with Campa and his allies pitted against the institutional weight of the Conservatoire.

The Turn to Militancy and the Instituto Musical (1886–1887)

Between 1883 and 1885, Campa had worked as a music critic for the liberal newspaper *La patria*, where he published extensive essays on operas such as *Carmen* by Bizet, *Il Guarany* by Gomes, and *La Gioconda* by Ponchielli. These writings combined detailed explanations of the works with sharp commentary on the broader theatrical culture in Mexico. His output also included coverage of the 1884 concert at the Tívoli de San Cosme and an article on Verdi's *Requiem*. Although the exact reasons behind Campa's departure from *La patria* remain unclear, clues suggest editorial dissatisfaction. The poor formatting and numerous errors in the 1885 publication of his article on *La Gioconda*, and its later corrected reprint in *El diario del hogar*, suggest that editorial neglect may have influenced his decision to switch outlets. *El diario del hogar* proved a fitting new home for Campa's increasingly militant voice. Directed by Filomeno Mata—a committed liberal who was imprisoned multiple times for denouncing social injustices—the newspaper provided a politically engaged platform consistent with Campa's critical ideals.⁵⁸

The year 1886 marked a turning point in Campa's critical writings. For the first time, he framed Richard Wagner not only as a modern composer but also as a romantic rebel—a misunderstood genius whose work symbolised artistic progress. That year, Campa published two key articles that offer insight into his aesthetic and ideological stance. The first, a review of Soubies and Malherbe's *L'œuvre dramatique de Richard Wagner*, underscored Wagner's relevance to Mexican cultural development and called for greater musical education. The second, an obituary for Franz Liszt, highlighted the role of artistic patronage and solidarity in enabling creative innovation. Together, these texts reflect Campa's growing frustration with Mexico's musical backwardness and his increasing reliance on symbolic figures like Wagner and Liszt to advocate for reform.

In April 1886, Campa made what appears to be his first bibliographical recommendation as a music critic. In an article published in *El diario del hogar*, he praised the newly released *L'œuvre dramatique de Richard Wagner* (1886) by Albert Soubies and Charles Malherbe, a book intended to guide curious listeners through the complexities of Wagnerian music. As the

⁵⁸ *El diario del hogar* was a liberal newspaper known for its radical tendencies but had a relatively low circulation. Originally founded in 1881 by Filomeno Mata (1845–1911) as an apolitical publication focused on domestic and everyday topics, the newspaper shifted its editorial line following the re-election of President Porfirio Díaz in 1888. From then on, it increasingly exposed political corruption and criticized the lack of patriotism among politicians, among other issues. As a result of its outspoken stance, Mata was imprisoned at least thirty times. See: Nora Pérez-Rayón, 'La prensa liberal en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX,' in *La república de las letras asomos a la cultura escrita del México decimonónico. Volumen II: Publicaciones periódicas y otros impresos*, eds. Belem Clark de Lara and Elisa Speckman (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005), 154–155.

authors themselves stated, their purpose was to help readers navigate ‘these complex but by no means incomprehensible [Wagnerian] works’.⁵⁹ This pedagogical approach aligned closely with Campa’s own critical mission: to educate both the public and his fellow critics in what he perceived as a more progressive and intellectually rigorous musical culture. The recommendation was not incidental. That Campa chose to highlight a Paris-published Wagnerian book in the same year of its release speaks to his investment in staying current with international trends, but also to his belief that Mexico’s musical public lacked the tools to understand and appreciate such repertoire.

Campa used the book as a springboard for a broader critique of the local music scene—pointing to the absence of sustained musical criticism and the lack of adequate musical education among audiences. According to Campa, the public considered Wagner’s music to be *monstruosa*. But how could they use such a label if they had never heard Wagner’s music? For Campa, Mexican audiences had only heard fragments of ‘operas conceived more or less in the usual system, which is far from the composer’s definitive one’.⁶⁰ With this, Campa was referring to the fragments he and his friends had performed in the concerts of 1885. But at the same time, Mexicans had acquainted with the famous march and second act chorus from *Tannhäuser*—popular highlights, possibly drawn from the Paris version or arranged independently for local performance. Only *Lohengrin*’s preludes were performed in concert until 1889, and the operas were performed at the National Theatre between November 1890 and April 1891.

The dual concern, education and critical culture, became a recurring theme in his writing and will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter. Likewise, the idea of Wagnerian education as a means to transform musical taste and cultural standards will return in chapter 4, where I analyse how Campa adapted Wagnerian books to his own agenda. The 1886 article thus marked a turning point: rather than merely reviewing works or concerts, Campa began to position himself as an advocate for systemic transformation. His rhetorical strategy here prefigures the more comprehensive indictment he would deliver two years later in his better-known essay ‘La música en México’ (1888). His recommendation of Soubies and Malherbe’s book, then, was both a pedagogical gesture and a critical manoeuvre—a way to reinforce his Wagnerian ideals while underscoring the cultural lag he perceived in Mexican institutions. It also reveals a degree of frustration, suggesting that the earlier efforts to promote *música elevada* through concerts had not yielded the hoped-for results.

⁵⁹ ‘[...] ces œuvres complexes, mais nullement inintelligibles.’ Albert Soubies and Charles Malherbe, *L’oeuvre dramatique de Richard Wagner* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1886), vii.

⁶⁰ ‘[...] óperas concebidas poco más o menos en el sistema usual, que dista mucho del definitivo del compositor.’ Gustavo E. Campa, ‘Bibliografía musical. *L’oeuvre dramatique de Richard Wagner, par A. Soubies et C. Malherbe*,’ *El diario del hogar*, 7 April 1886, 2.

In August 1886, following his recommendation of Soubies and Malherbe's book earlier that year, Campa published an obituary for Franz Liszt (1811–1886) to commemorate the recent passing of the celebrated composer and pianist.⁶¹ The article was divided into a lengthy introduction and a biographical sketch, through which Campa constructed Liszt as a towering figure of progress and innovation. From the outset, he framed Liszt as a trailblazing force in nineteenth-century music: 'A prodigious artist who, for more than half a century, was the object of universal admiration and who, endowed with an innovative and progressive spirit, exerted a powerful influence on the evolution and movement of contemporary music.'⁶² This narrative also served to introduce a broader argument. Campa's obituary adopted a more emotive tone than his previous writings, highlighting creative genius over objective reportage. This rhetorical shift served several functions. First, it portrayed Wagner as both visionary and misunderstood, in stark contrast to the prevailing image of Mexican composers. Second, Campa used the example of Europe's musical centres—especially Bayreuth—as a measure of civilisational development, highlighting Mexico's relative backwardness. Third, the elevated tone and admiration for the bond between Wagner and Liszt served to mask a deeper criticism: the lack of institutional support for local musical talent. This introduction aligned Campa's agenda with a defence of progress, implicitly criticising those musicians who remained anchored in the past.

A particularly striking feature of the article was Campa's emphasis on the personal and artistic relationship between Liszt and Wagner. From the beginning, Wagner was presented through the romantic trope of the misunderstood genius and political exile. In Campa's words, Wagner was a: 'Persecuted man, a victim of a painful situation, weighed down by the heartbreaking thought of never seeing his reformist projects—long cherished in his mind—come to fruition.'⁶³ Campa's language echoed Romantic ideals of artistic martyrdom, reinforcing the idea that Wagner, initially rejected, had to flee injustice before eventually achieving recognition in Germany—a sign of the 'future that awaited him.'

Campa reinforced this view by recalling the 1876 premiere of the *Ring* cycle at Bayreuth, where Liszt, both Wagner's father-in-law and supporter, was present. Citing the Italian critic Filippo Filippi (1830–1887), Campa recounted a dramatic scene from the celebratory banquet at the Festspielhaus:

⁶¹ Gustavo E. Campa, 'El abate Liszt,' *El diario del hogar*, 13 August 1886, 2.

⁶² 'Artista prodigioso que durante más de medio siglo fue objeto de universal admiración, y que, dotado de un espíritu innovador y progresista, ejerció poderosa influencia sobre la evolución y movimiento musicales contemporáneos.' *Ibid.*

⁶³ 'Proscrito, víctima de una penosa situación y agobiado por la desconsoladora idea de no ver jamás realizados sus proyectos de reforma que acariciaba desde entonces en su mente.' *Ibid.*

Chapter 2

Upon rising from the table, Wagner gave a second speech, this time to a great artist he called ‘father,’ Franz Liszt. He recalled the time when, poor and unknown, Liszt took him under his wing, supported him, and brought attention to his efforts to develop an art that was then condemned by all. ‘Without him,’ said Wagner, ‘I would be nothing today.’ The speech deeply moved everyone, especially when Wagner threw himself into the arms of the ‘father’. Liszt did not know what to do or say. His long white hair flowed, his thin arms trembled, and he could barely articulate a few words, concluding that Wagner was ‘the Shakespeare of music.’⁶⁴

While Wagner and Liszt were in fact close in age, Campa portrayed their relationship as one between a paternal benefactor and his artistic heir. This fiction, subtly emphasised by Filippi through italics in the original text, was extended by Campa to frame Wagner’s success as the result of steadfast support. The implication was clear: progress depends not only on genius, but also on the institutions and individuals who support it.

Campa also used Bayreuth itself as a symbol of what institutional investment in the arts could achieve:

There, in what was once an obscure corner of Bavaria—later immortalised by the reformer of lyric drama—formerly an uncultured and almost uninhabited town, and today, thanks to the efforts of a great artist and the munificence of a king, a sanctuary of art and centre of musical civilisation: there, death overtook the illustrious elder.⁶⁵

The comparison was intended to provoke reflection: if Bayreuth could be transformed into a hub of musical modernity through collective will and state support, why not Mexico City? Campa’s

⁶⁴ ‘Al levantarse de la mesa, Wagner dirigió un segundo discurso a un grande artista a quien llama padre, Franz Liszt. Recordó el tiempo en que, siendo pobre y oscuro, Liszt lo tomó bajo su protección, sirviéndole de apoyo y dio a conocer sus esfuerzos por el desenvolvimiento de un arte, entonces censurado por todos. Sin él, dijo Wagner, sería yo nulo actualmente. Este discurso produjo grande efecto y emoción, especialmente cuando Wagner se arrojó en los brazos del padre. Liszt no sabía que hacer ni qué decir. Flotaba su larga cabellera blanca, sus delgados brazos se agitaban, y con los labios pudo apenas articular algunas palabras, concluyendo que Wagner era el Shakespeare de la música.’ Ibid. The Italian version is in Filippo Filippi, ‘Secondo viaggio nelle regioni dell’avvenire,’ in Gioachino Marsillach Leonardt, *Riccardo Wagner. Saggio biografico critico*. Daniele Rubbi (traductor) (Milano: Fratelli Dumolard, 1881), 258. ‘Sul levare delle mense, ci fu un secondo discorso di Wagner all’indirizzo di un grande artista, ch’egli chiama padre, Francesco Liszt. Rammentò i tempi quando era povero, oscuro, e che Liszt lo prese a proteggere, a difenderlo, a far conoscere i suoi sforzi per un’arte nuova, avversata da tutti. Senza di lui, disse Wagner, sarei ancora nel nulla. Questo discorso fece un grande effetto di commozione, specialmente quando Wagner corse a gettarsi nelle braccia di suo padre. Liszt non sapeva che dire, né che fare. La lunga zazzera bianca svolazzava, le sue magre braccia gesticolavano, e colle labbra poté appena pronunziare qualche parola, concludendo che Wagner era il Shakespeare della musica. Il paragone non è strambo, né ardito, perché a molti, ed anche a me, udendo certe scene dei *Nibelungi*, veniva in mente Shakespeare.’ Filippi was famous for his travels to hear the music of Wagner in Germany. Filippi’s writings were published in *La perseveranza* in 1870 and 1876. See: Leonardo Pinzauti, revised by Julian Budden, ‘Filippi, Filippo,’ *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed 9 January 2024.

⁶⁵ ‘Allí, en el que fue oscuro rincón de la Baviera, y después sitio inmortalizado por el reformador del drama lírico, antes pueblo inculto y casi deshabitado; y hoy, merced a los esfuerzos de un artista superior y a la munificencia [munificencia] de un rey, convertido en santuario del arte y centro de civilización musical: allí sorprendió la muerte al ilustre anciano [Liszt],’ Gustavo E. Campa, ‘El abate Liszt,’ *El diario del hogar*, 13 August 1886, 2.

rhetorical question was underpinned by a broader critique of the country's inadequate cultural infrastructure.

Campa's admiration for the Wagner–Liszt partnership and his celebration of Bayreuth may have therefore served as a call for a different kind of musical future—one based on artistic freedom, progressive ideals, and strong institutional backing. In this light, the newly founded Instituto Musical Campa-Hernández Acevedo could be seen as an attempt to fulfil the very vision that Mexico's official institutions had failed to realise.

By 1886, dissatisfaction with the Conservatoire had spread beyond Campa. Other critics and artists also expressed disapproval of the institution under Alfredo Bablot, who had served as director since 1882. During his tenure, the Conservatoire underwent reforms promoted by Joaquín Baranda, Minister of Justice and Public Instruction. Yet for several musicians—including Campa and tenor Enrico Testa, both of whom had taught at the Conservatoire—this period of institutional reform coincided with an already established rupture. Testa's wife, Fanny Natali (Titania), though not officially part of the faculty, sided with her husband, further distancing herself from the Conservatoire.

This shared discontent found a coherent voice in the liberal press, where Campa and his allies—often writing under pseudonyms—used their platforms to criticize the institution's leadership and promote figures associated with the Instituto Musical. Natali regularly published in *La patria* and *La patria ilustrada*,⁶⁶ and occasionally contributed to *El diario del hogar*. Tenor and columnist José María Vigil y Robles (Pepe Vigil) wrote the Sunday music column for *La patria ilustrada* in 1886. Federico Gamboa contributed cultural commentary under the name *La Cocardière* in *El diario del hogar*, and Félix M. Alcérreca (alias *Orlando Kador*) authored the popular column 'Pastel de la Semana'. Although it is unclear whether Alcérreca and Campa had a personal relationship, Alcérreca's writings consistently supported Campa's artistic stance.

What began as aesthetic and ideological divergence within this circle became deliberate institutional opposition with the foundation of the Instituto Musical Campa Hernández Acevedo. The new school represented a clash of values, pedagogy, and artistic identity. The opposition was explicit from the outset: José María Vigil y Robles (J.V.R.),⁶⁷ a tenor and close friend of

⁶⁶ Both edited by Ireneo Paz

⁶⁷ José María Vigil y Robles (1850–1905), known as 'Pepe' among his friends, was a distinguished tenor and music critic. He was the son of the thinker José María Vigil Orozco (1829–1909), director of the National Library. Vigil studied singing with Enrique Testa and Fanny Natali de Testa, although he apparently never formally attended the National Conservatoire, opting instead for private lessons. He was admired from the beginning of his career for his talent and was advised to focus on opera rather than zarzuela; however, despite his teacher's wishes, he made his career primarily in zarzuela. His first steps in the theatrical world took place at the Titania salon. Campa dedicated to him the song *Schlaf, mein*

Campa, wrote in *La patria ilustrada* promoting the school's mission, introducing the directors and faculty, and emphasizing their cultural role in Mexican society.

Gustavo Campa, the young Mexican composer who can be said to lead musical art in Mexico, like the general chosen by Euterpe to command the army of her followers, together with the notable composer Juan Hernández, who is also a skilled flutist recently returned from Paris where he studied composition and the difficult instrument, the flute, alongside eminent professors, will soon open a school where enthusiasts of both sexes will study harmony, composition, instrumental music, and singing, under the direction of such notable teachers as Julio Ituarte, Enrique Testa, Ricardo Castro, Vicente Lucio, Luis David, and others, whose very names are the best recommendation for the institution.⁶⁸

The militant vocabulary used by Vigil sets the tone for the combative spirit with which the Institute was founded. It is notable how the chronicler uses militarized language to describe the positions of the two directors: Campa as Mexico's leading composer—a conqueror divinely appointed to lead other musicians—and Hernández as second-in-command, a flutist who had 'tamed the untamed beast' through his Parisian training. The critic also introduced the prominent teachers, whose reputations were so well established that they needed no further introduction.

After presenting the teachers, J.V.R. commented on their artistic profiles, distinguishing them from other instructors, and outlined the mission and objectives of the school:

These professors, as all Mexico knows, are the most distinguished found in our capital. Enthusiastic musicians, they are the priests of modern art and musical progress, so neglected here due to routine or the insufficiency of teachers from the past school, enemies of advancement and retrogressive artistically speaking. The new school will fill a void in Mexico, since we absolutely lack an institution to meet that need, even though we have one with the pompous name of the Conservatoire of Music and Declamation, which in all its years of existence has produced neither instrumentalists, composers, singers, nor dramatic artists. Many difficulties have had to be overcome by the founders of this project to put it into practice; but their efforts will be rewarded by the excellent artistic results their enterprise will achieve, being under the direction of such knowledgeable musicians and teachers, whose names, we repeat, are the best guarantee of success.⁶⁹

süßes Kind (Dors, mon cher trésor) included in *Zehn Lieder und Gesänge*. For comments on Vigil as pupil of Testa and Natali, see: 'Pepe Vigil protesta,' *El entreacto*, 31 July 1902, 3.

⁶⁸ 'Gustavo Campa, el joven compositor mexicano que puede decirse marcha a la cabeza del arte musical en México, como el general escogido por Euterpe para dirigir el ejército de sus adeptos, en compañía del notable compositor Juan Hernández, que además es un hábil flautista, recientemente llegado de París en donde hizo sus estudios de la composición y del difícil instrumento, la flauta, al lado de eminentes profesores, abrirá en breve un plantel en que los aficionados de ambos sexos estudiarán la armonía y la composición, la música instrumental y el canto, bajo la dirección de profesores tan notables como Julio Ituarte, Enrique Testa, Ricardo Castro, Vicente Lucio, Luis David y otros, cuyos solos nombres son la mejor recomendación del establecimiento.' J.V.R. 'Ecos de la semana,' *La patria ilustrada*, no. 42 (18 October 1886): 486. Contextual analysis suggests J.V.R. may be José María Vigil y Robles.

⁶⁹ 'Dichos profesores, como todo México sabe, son los más distinguidos de los que se encuentran en nuestra capital. Entusiastas músicos, son los sacerdotes del arte moderno y del progreso musical, tan descuidado entre nosotros por cuestión de rutina o de insuficiencia en los maestros de la escuela pasada, enemigos del adelanto y retrógrado, artísticamente hablando. [/] El nuevo plantel cubrirá un vacío en México, por carecer absolutamente de un establecimiento que llene esa necesidad, pues aún cuando contamos con unos que lleva el pomposo nombre del Conservatorio de Música y Declamación, en los

Vigil's combative attitude aligned closely with Campa's own stance in his writings from 1886 onwards. This shared militancy may have stemmed from their personal relationship and shared vision for Mexican music.

Félix M. Alcérreca, *alias* Orlando Kador was one of the critics from *El diario del hogar* who supported the progressive agenda of the Instituto Musical against the Conservatoire. Alcérreca agreed that the teaching staff consisted of remarkable young artists—gifted, knowledgeable, and invested in their students' progress. They had placed themselves with 'faith' and 'self-sacrifice' at the head of the institution 'to communicate with frankness and loyalty their high knowledge to all who place themselves under their direction.'⁷⁰

After praising the 'selfless' virtues of these priests of art, Kador attacked the old teachers, arguing that the younger generation was capable of adapting to the times. They were not interested in 'an old and ridiculous theory, accepted as the best credo' but rather in their own progressive ideals. Kador accused the older teachers of 'forgetting the future of a youth who, trusting their advice, only finds delays and obstacles in their progress.'⁷¹ For him, the younger teachers could foster advancement because they themselves had progressed through diligent study. Finally, the critic wished the Instituto Musical success and expressed hope that the school would flourish.

Fanny Natali, played a pivotal role in the public projection of the Instituto Musical. Her promotion of the school was not simply a matter of journalistic reporting, but the result of longstanding personal and artistic ties. As the wife of Enrico Testa—who opened his own singing school in April 1885⁷² and later joined the Instituto Musical—Titania had a direct stake in its success. Yet her involvement ran deeper: she shared a long-standing artistic camaraderie with Campa and many of the school's teachers, whom she had supported throughout their careers. Her home was also the site of the social and artistic salon where music, poetry, and pedagogy intertwined. In her writings, Titania adopted a diplomatic tone—less polemical than that of other critics—but consistent in portraying the Instituto as a space of artistic rigour, modern

largos años que lleva de fundado no ha producido ni como instrumentalistas, ni como compositores, ni como cantantes, ni como artistas dramáticos. [/] Muchas dificultades han tenido que vencer los iniciados del proyecto de que hablamos, para llegar a ponerlo en práctica; pero sus esfuerzos serán premiados por los excelentes resultados artísticos que tendrá su empresa, estando bajo la dirección de músicos y profesores tan entendidos, y cuyos nombres, volvemos a repetirlo, son la mejor garantía de ello.' Ibid.

⁷⁰ 'de los que con fe y abnegación se han puesto al frente de ese plantel, para comunicar con franqueza y lealtad sus altos conocimientos a todo aquel que se ponga bajo su dirección' Orlando Kador [Félix M. Alcérreca], 'Pastel de la semana,' *El diario del hogar*, 24 October 1886, 1.

⁷¹ 'una añeja y ridícula teoría, aceptada como el mejor credo,[...] olvidando el porvenir de una juventud que confiada a sus consejos, solo encuentra tardías moratorias y obstáculos en su progreso.' Ibid.

⁷² 'Academia canto, de declamación y otros estudios preparatorios para la escena lírica,' *El diario del hogar*, 29 March 1885, 5, 7.

instruction, and ethical seriousness. Her chronicles not only highlighted internal reforms and praised the faculty, but also helped shape a public image of the school as a legitimate and forward-thinking alternative to the official Conservatoire. Through her voice, Titania positioned the Instituto within a broader project of cultural renewal, while also defending the artistic integrity of a close-knit musical community to which she deeply belonged.

According to Titania, the list of teachers was one of the main attractions of the Instituto Musical. Some of the musicians already mentioned above were Felipe Villanueva, Julio Ituarte, and Ricardo Castro (who was initially involved in the early stages of the project but ultimately did not join). For Titania, a particularly notable figure was the participation of Germanophile man of letters Ignacio Altamirano, a local celebrity who regularly attended the Monday soirées she hosted. Campa held Altamirano in high esteem and dedicated to him the obituary of Franz Liszt discussed earlier. The presence of Altamirano reveals an ideal that went beyond musical instruction: it evoked a vision of cultured republicanism in which the arts, education, and civic virtue were deeply intertwined. Altamirano, one of the most prominent men of letters of the second half of the Mexican nineteenth century, had been an influential teacher at the Liceo Hidalgo⁷³ and a public intellectual who symbolized the moral and aesthetic aspirations of Mexico's liberal elite. His participation in the Instituto—as a planned lecturer on *Indumentaria*⁷⁴—suggested that the school sought not only to reform musical pedagogy, but to cultivate a broader ideal of modern, enlightened citizenship. For Campa and his circle, Altamirano's support lent cultural prestige and political legitimacy to their project. It also aligned with the Germanophile sensibilities that both men shared, positioning the Instituto as part of a cosmopolitan yet nationalist endeavour to elevate the arts.

⁷³ The Liceo Hidalgo was a literary institution that continued the legacy of the Academia de San Juan de Letrán and the Ateneo Mexicano, both active in the first half of the nineteenth century. Founded in 1850, the Liceo went through several stages. It was during its second phase, beginning in 1870, that Ignacio Altamirano became involved alongside other writers, organizing the so-called *bohémias literarias*. According to Berenice Ramírez Lago, members of this group had collaborated with musicians as early as 1868, inaugurating the dramatic arts section of the Conservatoire of the Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana—a moment that marked the institution's transition to the name Conservatorio de Música y Declamación. The Liceo Hidalgo later declined before experiencing a second period of activity (1872–1882) and a third (1884–1888). For more on the relationship between Altamirano, the Liceo Hidalgo, and the Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana, see: Ramírez Lago, “*Gran concierto vocal, instrumental y de orfeonismo...*,” 67. For an overview of the activities of the Liceo Hidalgo and its members, see: Alicia Perales Ojeda, ‘Liceo Hidalgo,’ *Enciclopedia de la literatura en México*, <https://www.elem.mx/estgrp/datos/123>, (accessed 1 February 2024).

⁷⁴ *Indumentaria* was a term that, in this context, likely referred not only to clothing but to the broader aesthetics of public presentation, refinement, and decorum for performers. Berenice Ramírez Lago notes that Altamirano was responsible for ‘studying the customs of the druids in order to lend authenticity to the props, costumes, and stage design [for *Norma* by Bellini];’ Ramírez Lago, “*Gran concierto vocal, instrumental y de orfeonismo...*,” 124.

Another of the Instituto Musical's attractions was its plan to replace conventional exams with trimestral public concerts, 'replacing the examination system, whose results are not always satisfactory either for the teacher nor the student.'⁷⁵ Although this pedagogical proposal echoed a broader debate in the press, the ambitious idea of holding concerts every three months ultimately resulted in only one performance, which took place in June 1887.

The Instituto's first newsletter had initially announced a debut concert for December 1886. However, for reasons unknown, the event was delayed six months. It was not until May 1887 that directors Campa and Hernández Acevedo proudly extended an invitation for their inaugural concert, held at the *salón* de la Sociedad Francesa on June 2. Titania, in her column, reproduced the full invitation, which emphasised the school's mission:

The desire to introduce and promote modern music in our country—a guiding idea behind the founding of our Instituto Musical—now compels us to offer the present concert to the public, featuring a program composed of selected works from the vast repertoire of contemporary composers. As this will be their first performance in Mexico, including several excerpts from Verdi's *Otello*, recently premiered in Europe to extraordinary acclaim, we hope the public will respond to our call, thus fulfilling the sole aspiration of our artistic endeavour.⁷⁶

As Titania underscored, the main attraction was *Otello*, Verdi's latest opera, which had premiered in Milan in February 1887 to widespread acclaim. Mexican newspapers had closely followed the European reception of the work, celebrating what they saw as a stylistic shift in Verdi's music—moving away from traditional *bel canto* toward a more modern, even Wagnerian approach. Some commentators referred to this development as the emergence of a *Verdi semi-germanizado*. It was said to be an opera in which Verdi had completely departed from the traditional Italian school that was still favoured in Mexico.⁷⁷

Notably, the concert's performers were professional musicians rather than students. This decision may suggest that the Instituto lacked either a sufficient number of students or students with the skill required to tackle such an ambitious, mixed program featuring orchestral and vocal works (See Appendices A.8 for the concert programme). Alternatively, the organisers

⁷⁵ 'sustituyendo el sistema de exámenes, cuyos resultados no son siempre satisfactorios ni para el profesor ni para el alumno.' Titania [Fanny Natali], 'Ecos de la semana,' *El diario del hogar*, 4 November 1886, 1.

⁷⁶ 'El deseo de dar a conocer e introducir la música moderna en nuestro país, idea que presidió a la fundación de nuestro Instituto Musical, indúcenos ahora a ofrecer al público el presente concierto bajo un programa compuesto de obras escogidas en el vasto repertorio de los compositores contemporáneos. Siendo esta su primera audición en México, y figurando varios fragmentos del *Otello* de Verdi, recientemente estrenado en Europa con inusitado éxito, esperamos que el público acudirá a nuestro llamamiento, satisfaciendo así las únicas aspiraciones de nuestra tentativa artística.' Titania [Fanny Natali], 'Ecos de la semana,' *El diario del hogar*, 5 May 1887, 1.

⁷⁷ Fernanda Muñoz Salazar, 'El polémico estreno del "*Otello*" de Verdi a finales del siglo XIX en México,' in *De Nueva España a México: el universo musical mexicano entre centenarios (1517–1917)*, ed. Javier Marín-López (Sevilla: Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, 2020), 326.

may have wished to feature professional performers from the outset, in order to guarantee a successful presentation. The program itself was weighted heavily toward instrumental music, with only four of the thirteen pieces featuring vocal performance—marking a significant shift from earlier local concert traditions.

Soprano Carmen Unda, for example, sang the role of Desdemona in three excerpts from *Otello*: the love duet ‘Già nella notte densa’ from Act I (with tenor José Vigil y Robles, the belicoso critic), and the final-act selections ‘The Willow Song’ and ‘Ave Maria’. These choices highlighted both the romantic and tragic aspects of the character, with Campa accompanying these pieces on piano. Vigil also performed Campa’s *Je t’aime*, a *romanza* for tenor and orchestra. Both singers were well-known figures in elite musical circles. It is possible that the concert presented Unda and Vigil as accomplished and versatile students of Enrique Testa, voice professor at the Instituto Musical. Accomplished, because both Unda and Vigil were well-known in Mexican society for their artistic talent; versatile, because they demonstrated their ability to perform various types of repertoire, including works composed within a contemporary musical system. Furthermore, their participation may have been intended, in part, to showcase the effectiveness of their teacher, Enrico Testa, who taught singing at the Instituto Musical. Though Testa had built his reputation as a proponent of *bel canto*,⁷⁸ the performers’ interpretation of *Otello*—a work aligned with newer vocal aesthetics—suggests that his pedagogical reach extended into modern repertoire as well.

In this light, the concert was more than an artistic event—it was a manifesto. It revealed the Institute’s pedagogical priorities (professionalization, performance, modernity), its alignment with European aesthetics (especially French and Germanic), and its effort to position itself as an elite cultural institution capable of rivalling the Conservatoire.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that many of the performers had trained at the Conservatoire itself—except for Felipe Villanueva, a private student of Ituarte, and José Vigil, pupil of Testa. In fact, several of them received government support to complete their studies abroad. Musicians such as Juan Hernández Acevedo, Adrián Galarza, and Jacobo García Sagredo had studied in Paris, where they encountered an expansive repertoire and demanding standards of performance. The works selected for the concert likely reflected pieces they had studied or heard abroad. For instance, García Sagredo’s interpretation of Paganini’s *Violin Concerto No. 1* may have stemmed directly from his training—a work demanding such theatrical virtuosity that, if it had been performed before, it could only have been performed in Mexico by foreign touring virtuosos. One notable example was the Cuban violinist Antonio

⁷⁸ ‘El Sr. Enrique Testa,’ *El libre sufragio*, 18 May 1880, 3.

Figuroa, who introduced such repertoire in 1884, as noted by Campa in his review of the Tívoli concert.

The case of García Sagredo, Galarza, Hernández Acevedo, and others—like Rosa Palacios—speaks to a broader ambition: to be consecrated as legitimate artists through European validation. And yet, their return to Mexico placed them in a paradoxical position. Trained to meet the demands of cosmopolitan stages, they found themselves in a national context lacking the public, institutional, and critical infrastructure to sustain those ambitions. The absence of student performers in the concert, the reliance on a handful of virtuoso teachers, and the difficulty in organising more than one event—despite the Instituto’s ambitious program—underscore the disconnect between artistic aspiration and structural limitations. This tension would come to define the careers of many Mexican musicians in the late nineteenth century: cosmopolitan in training, but constrained by a local system unable (or unwilling) to support them.

The Promises and Contradictions of Civilisation and Progress

The hostility against the National Conservatoire expressed by Gustavo Campa and his circle must be read with contextual nuance. Despite their criticism of the institution, many of the musicians affiliated with the Instituto Musical had in fact trained at the Conservatoire or even continued to work there. Figures such as Jacobo García Sagredo, for example, held teaching positions at both schools.⁷⁹ Others, like Felipe Villanueva, were private students of prominent Conservatoire professors such as Ituarte. Similarly, the singers who followed Natali and Testa to the Instituto were not rejecting the Conservatoire per se, but rather following their teachers after internal disputes with the Conservatoire’s director, Alfredo Bablot. What emerges from the period’s discourse is not a coherent institutional opposition, but a rhetorical strategy: critics deployed the figure of the Conservatoire as a symbol of an entrenched order that needed to be overcome. In practice, professional and pedagogical networks between the two institutions remained porous.

The results achieved by Campa and his friends must therefore be evaluated within their specific historical and institutional context. Writers such as Campa used the name ‘Conservatoire’ as a stand-in for their broader frustrations, allowing them to generalize without naming individuals. For instance, Campa held Ituarte in high esteem—as his former piano teacher—while openly opposing Morales as a composition teacher and Bablot as the

⁷⁹ Jacobo García Sagredo returned to Mexico in February 1885. ‘What is going on in the city and suburbs,’ *The Two Republics*, 21 February 1885, 4.

Conservatoire's director. In the following chapter, we will delve more deeply into the individuals Campa labeled as the 'rémoras del progreso' (drags on progress) and examine how his opposition to them was articulated through the press.

Yet the central issue extended beyond institutional rivalries. The very concept of *civilisation*—associated with cosmopolitanism, high culture, and progress—shaped the ideals of Mexico's nineteenth-century musical elite. This framework elevated specific repertoires and musical practices—European serious opera, chamber music, the symphonic tradition—as markers of cultural legitimacy. Campa's disdain for zarzuela, opera buffa, and popular entertainment reflected an idealist worldview in which the arts were meant to educate and elevate the public. His admiration for the French critic Eusèbe Lucas, whose observations Campa invoked to indirectly contrast European refinement with Mexican 'provincialism,' illustrates how deeply he internalized the idea that Mexico belonged on the cultural periphery.

Ironically, the ideal of civilisation became a double-edged sword. As early as 1883, Melesio Morales had already warned about the tyranny of comparison. Responding to widespread claims that the Conservatoire failed to train competitive artists, Morales lamented that the public expected students to rival global celebrities such as Adelina Patti, Christine Nilsson, Rubinstein, Paganini, or Massenet. He wrote:

The professors of the Mexican Conservatoire are not only obliged to admit all kinds of students; they must also—oh tyranny!—turn their pupils into artists who, even though our public cannot support them, must rival Patti, Nilsson, Tamberlick, Storts [sic], Rubinstein, Paganini, Massenet, and Bottesini. Because if they only produce students who, while not being geniuses, can still be applauded—like Rosa Palacios, Luz Reynoso, Rosenda Bernal, Antonia Ramos, Joaquina Alfaro, Delfina Mancera, María Ocadiz, Pedro Manzano, Jacobo García, Enrique Palacios, Arturo Aguirre, Lauro Beristain, Juan Beghowick, Castro Serrano, Librado Suárez, Ricardo Castro, Gustavo Campa, and many others—then the press and other discontented voices cry out: 'That Conservatoire produces nothing! Shut it down!'⁸⁰

According to Morales, Mexican musicians were dismissed not because they lacked talent, but because they were never 'European enough'.

⁸⁰ 'Los profesores del Conservatorio Mexicano, no sólo están obligados a recibir toda clase de gente; deben también ¡oh tiranía! formar de sus alumnos, artistas que, aunque nuestro público no pueda sostenerlos, rivalicen con la Patti, la Nilson, Tamberlick, Storts [sic], Rubinstein, Paganini, Massenet y Bottesini; pues que, si sólo educan discípulos que sin ser eminencias se hagan aplaudir como Rosa Palacios, Luz Reynoso, Rosenda Bernal, Antonia Ramos, Joaquina Alfaro, Delfina Mancera, María Ocadiz, Pedro Manzano, Jacobo García, Enrique Palacios, Arturo Aguirre, Lauro Beristain, Juan Beghowick, Castro Serrano, Librado Suárez, Ricardo Castro, Gustavo Campa y otros muchos, entonces el *cuarto poder* y otros descontentos alzan el grito al cielo exclamando: ¡Ese Conservatorio no da nada! ¡Que se cierre ese Conservatorio!...' Páris [Melesio Morales], 'Establecimientos musicales de Florencia, Milán y México,' *El nacional*, 28 March 1883, 1.

A critic writing under the pseudonym *Orlando*—possibly Morales himself—echoed this concern during the 1883 Italian opera season. He lamented the public’s dependence on foreign validation:

In the end, we only accept as good what arrives from across the seas. We are tributaries of foreign nations, to whom we pay our due in exchange for their productions and industries. We even go so far as to proclaim as sublime everything that comes from abroad. [...] We strive to reach the level of other nations, and yet at the decisive moment, we forget our goals and fall back into the same vice—trapped in a defective circle, unable to find a resolution that brings us peace. We are capable of recognizing the good and the bad, but we are unjust with ourselves. We demand that everything we produce be extraordinary, lest we dismiss it altogether.⁸¹

This type of cultural self-rejection directly impacted the careers of Mexican performers. Soprano Rosa Palacios, for example, returned from Italy in 1883 only to be received coldly by the public. Despite her international training and the support of impresario Napoleón Sieni, the lack of local recognition was so disheartening that even Morales—a tireless advocate for her—appeared discouraged. As noted by Gamboa in his memoirs, Palacios eventually shifted from opera to zarzuela, where she earned a more stable income ‘I understood her tears: an artist, once granted a scholarship to study in Rome, now watching her most radiant dreams collapse—an entire youth consecrated to art—brought low by that crude, imperious, and unyielding force: money!...’⁸² Tenor José Vigil made a similar move, building his career in the zarzuela scene. For singers as for instrumentalists, the volatility of public taste and lack of institutional support made careers in ‘high art’ nearly unsustainable.

Campa and his allies were aware of the contradictions they critiqued. As explored in earlier sections, even while invoking critics like Eusèbe Lucas, Albert Soubies, Charles Malherbe and Filippo Filippi, to legitimize their views, they reinforced the belief that European authority was necessary to define artistic value. Under the logic of civilisation and progress, Mexicans were always playing catch-up—less refined, less central, and thus forever dependent on

⁸¹ ‘y ya en fin solo recibimos como bueno lo que nos viene del otro lado de los mares. [/] Somos tributarios de las naciones extranjeras, a quienes pagamos nuestro contingente a trueque de sus confecciones e industrias, y llevamos nuestra paciente condescendencia hasta proclamar como sublime, todo aquello que nos llega de allende de los mares. [/] Hacemos esfuerzos por llegar a la altura de otras naciones, y sin embargo, en el momento dado, olvidamos nuestros propósitos y caemos en el mismo vicio, encerrándonos en el mismo círculo defectuoso, sin encontrar una resolución favorable que nos tranquilice. [/] Somos apreciadores de lo bueno y lo malo, pero somos injustos con nosotros mismos, llevando nuestras exigencias hasta el ridículo: deseamos que lo que nos atañe se desprenda de lo común y pase a lo extraordinario para conmovernos y conmover al mundo entero.’ Orlando, ‘La ópera,’ *El nacional*, 7 December 1883, 1. Critic Félix M. Alcérreca wrote under the pseudonym Orlando Kador in some articles. However, the stylistic differences between his writings as Kador and those signed simply as ‘Orlando’ suggest distinct authorial voices.

⁸² ‘Comprendí su llanto; una artista pensionada en Roma, que veía derrumbarse sus mejores ensueños, toda una juventud consagrada al arte, por la razón grosera, imperiosa, perdurable, el dinero!’ Gamboa, *Impresiones y recuerdos*, 103.

Chapter 2

external validation. Young artists like Campa were products of a system plagued by structural indifference and weighed down by impossible standards. In the chapters to come, we will see how Campa increasingly turned to European models of authority—Pedrell, Saint-Saëns, and Wagner—not only as symbols of innovation, but as figures whose recognition might jumpstart the longed-for cultural transformation.

Chapter 3 Articulating Mexican Progress Abroad: Campa, Pedrell and the Politics of Musical Authority (1888–1889)

In 1888, the Mexican composer and critic Gustavo Campa wrote to the famous Spanish musicologist Felipe Pedrell (1841–1922), enclosing articles and compositions to introduce himself and his work. Pedrell replied enthusiastically, marking the beginning of a lasting intellectual friendship. Some months later, Campa confessed to his correspondent that, amid the hostility he endured at home, Pedrell’s benevolent voice and paternal advice had encouraged him to continue working ‘for Art, for the progress of my country.’¹

This chapter explores the ideological and intellectual alliance formed between Campa and Pedrell during the years 1888 and 1889. Their relationship offers a window onto shared notions of progress and cosmopolitanism, shaped by a sense of marginality at the cultural periphery. Both men imagined themselves as misunderstood geniuses fighting against the ‘philistines’ of Mexico, bound together by a symbolic brotherhood of reformers. At the same time, this transatlantic bond was entangled with conflicts involving other Mexican musicians, above all Melesio Morales (1838-1908), whose authority Campa challenged, and Ildefonso de Olano, whose open letters sought to dismantle the elevation that Pedrell conferred upon the young critic.

Drawing on press articles and correspondence, the chapter reconstructs the cultural networks that enabled this dialogue and examines how they shaped contemporary ideas of modernity and identity in music. It begins with Pedrell’s call for a fraternal alliance of Hispanic-American artists in the Spanish newspaper *Ilustración musical hispano-americana* (1888–1896) and with Mexican Felipe Ramírez Tello’s enthusiastic response in *El polífono* (1888–1889), before turning to Campa’s entry into this exchange and his strategic self-fashioning as a reformer. The subsequent sections analyse the polemics that ensued: Morales’s defence of the Italian school against Pedrell’s ideal of a modern Spanish identity, and Olano’s attempt to discredit Campa by appealing to Pedrell’s impartiality.

This chapter therefore situates the correspondence between Campa and Pedrell within the broader context of nineteenth-century musical polemics. By examining how ideals of

¹ Gustavo E. Campa, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 10 October 1888, 1, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/346.

fraternity and artistic mission were mobilised across the Atlantic, and how these ideals clashed with local disputes in Mexico, the chapter reveals the paradoxes of cultural authority in a peripheral nation. In doing so, it also places into perspective the narratives that later endowed Campa with an authority that continued well into the twentieth century.

Forging a Transatlantic Bond: *El polífono* and the *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*

In the spring of 1888, the Spanish musicologist Felipe Pedrell, editor of the *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, sent a private letter to Felipe Ramírez Tello, the editor of the Mexican newspaper *El polífono* (1888–1889), proposing a transatlantic collaboration to unite Hispanic-American artists. Ramírez Tello, who lived and worked in provincial Mexico—far from the cultural institutions of the capital—welcomed the initiative with enthusiasm. Soon after receiving the letter, he published both Pedrell’s invitation and his own reply in *El polífono*, thus sharing the exchange with his readers. Pedrell, in turn, reproduced these texts in the *Ilustración*, accompanied by his own commentary. This transatlantic dialogue—brief but rich in symbolic meaning—provides a useful counterpoint to the position that Campa would soon present to Pedrell, one that portrayed Mexican musical culture as isolated and stagnant. Furthermore, the interaction between Ramírez Tello and Pedrell sheds light on a forgotten figure in Mexican music history, whose name has been associated almost exclusively with *El polífono*—a publication often cited, yet largely unknown due to the scarcity of surviving issues.²

Ramírez Tello was a composer, conductor, journalist, and editor who built his career in the provinces. Like Campa and Morales, he cultivated a polymathic identity that blurred the lines between artistic creation, public education, and editorial work. As a writer, he published articles in *El contemporáneo* of Alvarado and *El polífono*, advocating for the social value of music and the need to strengthen local education systems.³ His intellectual project echoed the ideals of earlier initiatives such as the Mexican Philharmonic Society of 1866, which had promoted the arts as a vehicle for national uplift. In April 1888, Tello launched *El polífono, periódico dominical de música, literatura, ciencias y artes*, a weekly newspaper printed in Puente de Alvarado,

² Jesús C. Romero, ‘El francesismo en la evolución musical de México,’ *Carnet Musical*, supplement 1, no. 4 (1949): 119; Robert Stevenson, ‘Latin America in *Ilustración Musical Hispano-Americana*,’ *Inter-American Music Review* 3, no. 2 (1981): 152; Gabriel Pareyón, ‘Polífono, EL,’ in *Diccionario enciclopédico de música en México*, vol. 2 (Guadalajara: Universidad Panamericana, 2006), 837.

³ For Ramírez Tello as a salon music composer and collaborator in the daily newspaper *El Contemporáneo* (Puente de Alvarado, Veracruz), see: F. M. A. [Félix María Alcérreca], ‘El Sr. Felipe Ramírez Tello,’ *El cronista musical*, no. 18 (28 August 1887): 4.

Veracruz.⁴ The ambitious scope of its subtitle—Music, Literature, Science and the Arts—suggests a universalist agenda rooted in the belief that culture should be both accessible and elevated. Rather than seeing it as a marginal initiative, the launch of *El Polífono* in provincial Veracruz challenges the assumption that cultural ambition was exclusive to the nation's capital, and speaks of a deeper yearning to place Mexican musical thought on the map of global modernity.

Upon its launch in April 1888, *El polífono* followed the editorial custom of sending a complimentary issue to introduce new publications to the intellectual community. The *polífono*'s case shows that this practice had local and international outcomes. In Mexico City, daily newspapers such as *La patria*, *El tiempo*, and *El siglo diez y nueve* acknowledged the newspaper's appearance with a cordial welcome.⁵ The most enthusiastic response came from *La política*, which praised *El polífono*'s mission of promoting the origins of music, literature, and science, and wished the editors 'numerous subscribers and a Methuselah's lifespan.'⁶ While these comments were published in minor sections such as the *gacetilla* (short-news), their tone suggests a recognition of the newspaper's cultural intentions. At the time, no music periodicals were being printed in the capital—Félix M. Alcérreca (1845-1937) edited the music journal *El cronista musical* in 1887, but only survived one year—making *El polífono* a rare voice among Mexico's specialised music journals in the 1880s.

Beyond Mexico, *El polífono* also attracted the attention of European music journals. Two particularly illuminating responses came from the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* and the *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*.⁷ The Italian journal offered a brief but enthusiastic welcome, describing *El polífono* as 'a publication inspired by the noblest intentions, and

⁴ Luis García Pérez was co-editor of the newspaper. *El Polífono*'s publication date was first announced in 1887, when Félix M. Alcérreca, owner and editor of *El cronista musical*, noted that its first issue would appear on 1 October 1887. However, short news in the daily press shows that *El polífono* was published six months later. See 'Nuevos periódicos,' *El cronista musical*, no. 22 (25 September 1887): 4.

⁵ 'El polífono,' *La patria*, 6 April 1888, 3; 'El polífono,' *El siglo diez y nueve*, 7 April 1888, 3; 'El polífono,' *El tiempo*, 25 April 1888, 3; 'Alla rinfusa,' *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, no. 19 (6 May 1888): 177; 'Varia. España. Bibliografía,' *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 8 (15 May 1888): 63.

⁶ 'Su misión en ese valle de lágrimas, es dar a conocer el origen de algunas artes y ciencias tales como la música, literatura, etc. [/] Al darle la bienvenida y retornarle el fraternal saludo que nos dirige, deseamos a sus estimables redactores, numerosos suscriptores y una vida de Matusalem a dicho periódico.' 'Un debut,' *La política*, 7 April 1888, 2.

⁷ The *Ilustración musical hispano-americana* was an eight-page magazine, printed by Torres y Segui, that included biographical articles, literary and religious critiques, and musical news. Its main sections featured illustrations of artists, musical monuments, and musical allegories. A.L. Salvans managed the news section, covering national and international news, new publications, and obituaries. A supplement offered musical works and a bibliography section written by Pedrell himself. Description based on *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 1 (1 January 1888)

seemingly edited with perfect competence and elegance of form.⁸ This praise—especially the reference to its refined presentation—suggests that *El polífono* aligned itself with the visual and discursive codes of serious music journalism in Europe. The *Ilustración*, meanwhile, provided more extensive coverage: not only did it introduce the Mexican editors and praise their initiative, but it also reproduced excerpts from *El polífono*. The information provided identifies some of *El polífono*'s main collaborators, including Campa, Morales and Alcérreca, which gives us an idea of the journal's level of specialisation. These responses position *El polífono* within a broader transatlantic print network and underscore the permeability of cultural and intellectual borders in the late nineteenth century.

The context in which the *Ilustración musical hispano-americana* emerged shows the relevance of the publication and its editor. The *Ilustración* emerged in a vibrant intellectual climate shaped by the evolution of musical criticism in Barcelona. From the 1860s onwards, the Catalan capital witnessed the consolidation of a second phase of critical discourse, catalysed in part by Wagnerian debates such as the famous polemic between Antonio Fargas y Soler and Joaquín Marsillach in 1875. Newspapers like *El diario de Barcelona* became key arenas where the warring positions on Wagner's legacy were staged. This burgeoning critical culture gave rise to what has been described as the 'first Spanish musicology,' in which figures such as Rafael Mitjana, Cecilio de Roda, and Pedrell produced essays of lasting historiographical value. Pedrell himself played a central role in this intellectual milieu, not only through his contributions to *La vanguardia* and *La España musical*, but also by editing influential journals such as *Notas musicales y literarias* (1882–1883) and, later, the *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*. Given his editorial responsibilities, Pedrell contributed little to the critical content of the *Ilustración* himself; however, the journal regularly featured essays by prominent Catalan writers such as Fargas y Soler, Rodoreda, and Gras y Elías. The emergence of the *Ilustración* in 1888 was part of a broader effort by the Catalan bourgeois intelligentsia to institutionalise music criticism and elevate it to a discipline in its own right, one that blurred the lines between journalism, historiography, and national cultural agendas.⁹

Within this context, Pedrell's review did more than acknowledge the *El polífono*'s existence—it actively embraced it as a kindred initiative. The journalist pledged to follow its

⁸ 'È una pubblicazione ispirata a nobilissimi intenti, e ci sembra redatta con perfetta competenza ed eleganza di forma.' 'Alla rinfusa,' *Gazetta musicale di Milano*, no. 19 (6 May 1888): 177.

⁹ Emilio Casares, 'Crítica y críticos desde la segunda mitad del siglo XIX al siglo XX: construcción historiográfica, debate estético, recepción y búsqueda del idioma propio a través de la crítica madrileña y barcelonesa,' in *Música lírica y prensa en España (1868–1936): ópera, drama lírico y zarzuela*, eds. José Ignacio Suárez García, Ramón Sobrino, and María Encina Cortizo (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, 2018), 60–61. For the emergence of specialised music criticism in Spain during the 1870s, see: 48–55; for Pedrell's role as a critical musicographer and precursor of Spanish musicology, see: 51.

artistic campaign and commended two articles by Ramírez Tello in particular: *La enseñanza musical* (*Musical Teaching*) and *Proemio al estudio de la estética de la música, rapsodia didáctica* (*Prologue to the Study of the Aesthetics of Music, Didactic Rhapsody*), showing that Pedrell recognised Ramírez Tello as an equal, a ‘serious’ intellectual voice engaged with Mexico’s artistic progress. So impressed was Pedrell that the review concluded with a celebratory statement: ‘A publication as important as *El polífono* is of special interest to us, for it shall become an artistic bond between our people and the American nations—two branches of a single glorious race, still scarcely acquainted with each other’s productivity and artistic expressions of all kinds.’¹⁰ This language—evoking notions of shared ancestry such as a ‘glorious race’ and ‘glorious past,’ as well as the ideal of an ‘artistic bond’—suggests that Pedrell, editor of the *Ilustración*, may have authored the anonymous article himself. In this way, Pedrell’s review worked as a prelude to a more formal initiative: a fraternal call for artistic unity between Spain and Hispanic-America, which Pedrell would launch shortly thereafter.

In May 1888, Pedrell issued a fraternal appeal in the *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, calling for the unification of Hispanic-American artists. He explained that this initiative had prompted him to write privately to Ramírez Tello, ‘to make an appeal to Mexican artists in particular and American artists in general, with the aim of strengthening artistic ties and establishing broad intellectual exchanges among peoples of the same and glorious Latin origin.’¹¹ Pedrell grounded his call in an idealised vision of a shared ‘Latin ancestry’—a cultural lineage traced back to the ‘glorious past of the ancient world.’ By invoking this common heritage, he sought to forge transatlantic bonds that transcended national borders. His rhetoric carefully avoided references to Spain’s colonial legacy, projecting instead an image of mutual recognition and voluntary fraternity between equals.¹²

¹⁰‘Una publicación tan importante como El Polífono nos interesa especialmente porque será lazo de unión artística entre nuestro pueblo y el americano, si bien hijos de una misma gloriosa raza muy poco conocidos entre sí en su productividad y en todo género de manifestaciones artísticas.’ ‘Varia. España. Bibliografía,’ *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 8 (15 May 1888): 63.

¹¹ ‘dirigirle haciendo un llamamiento a los artistas mexicanos en particular y a los americanos en general, para estrechar vínculos de relaciones artísticas y establecer entre pueblos de un mismo y glorioso origen latino anchas corrientes intelectuales.’ Felipe Pedrell, ‘Llamamiento fraternal a los artistas músicos americanos,’ *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 13 (30 July 1888): 99.

¹² From the early sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, the Spanish Empire governed the Spanish countries of Latin America. By the late nineteenth century, most of these former colonies had gained independence, and Spain’s remaining territories in the Americas were limited to Cuba and Puerto Rico. Spain lost these final colonies to the United States in 1898, marking the definitive end of the Spanish Empire in the Americas. See John L. Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain over Cuba, 1895–1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), ix–xii; Luis E. Aguilar, ‘Cuba, c. 1860–1934,’ in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 5: c. 1870 to 1930, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 229–64; Ángel Quintero-Rivera, ‘Puerto Rico, c. 1870–1940,’ in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 5: c. 1870 to 1930, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 265–86.

It is important to note that Pedrell's use of 'American artists' reflects the Latin American perspective, where *América* designates the continent as a unified whole. In this context, an 'American' refers to anyone born in the Americas. This usage stands in stark contrast to the English-speaking world, where 'the Americas' denotes a geopolitical division between North and South, and 'American' refers exclusively to citizens of the United States.

This discursive strategy was not accidental; it served to reframe the Spanish–Mexican relationship in terms of modern cooperation, deliberately sidestepping the political asymmetries of the past. It also marks a striking contrast with the narrative of liberal thinkers such as Manuel Siliceo—Minister of Public Instruction under Maximilian's empire and first president of the Mexican Philharmonic Society in 1886. As noted in Chapter One, Siliceo and others argued that Mexico's colonial past was to blame for its historical stagnation, a diagnosis that became part of the official liberal narrative distancing modern Mexico from its Spanish inheritance. The tension between these competing historical visions resurfaces later in the chapter, in the sharp public disagreement between Pedrell and Mexican composer Melesio Morales.

Within this broader appeal for cultural unity, Pedrell also extended a specific invitation to Ramírez Tello to contribute to the *Ilustración* by submitting biographies, literary articles, musical scores, and portraits of distinguished 'sons of America'. The Spanish editor presented his journal both as a platform for cultural exchange and as a remedy for the mutual ignorance he believed persisted among the nations of Hispanic America. 'Let us reach out to one another,' he wrote, 'so that American and Spanish artists may shake hands and come to know each other better.'¹³ Although Pedrell never directly acknowledged the geopolitical pressures that may have motivated this appeal, his emphasis on unity can be read as a subtle response to the rising influence of U.S. imperialism, lending a note of urgency to the ideal of Latin solidarity.

Ramírez Tello enthusiastically embraced Pedrell's vision of a transatlantic brotherhood. On 17 June 1888, *El polífono* reproduced Pedrell's appeal alongside Tello's own public response, in which he pledged to support the *Ilustración* and to work 'with passionate enthusiasm for the sacred cause of Hispano-American music.'¹⁴ Ramírez Tello expanded Pedrell's call by urging Mexican maestros to submit their opinions and compositions to both

¹³ 'haga usted que los artistas americanos y españoles nos demos la mano y nos conozcamos algo más de lo que lo somos'. 'Varia. España. Bibliografía,' *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 8 (15 May 1888): 63.

¹⁴ 'protestándole [al Sr. Felipe Pedrell] que trabajaré con ardiente entusiasmo por la sagrada causa artístico musical Hispano-Americana.' 'Llamamiento fraternal a los artistas músicos americanos,' *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 13 (30 July 1888): 99. According to the *Ilustración*, *El polífono* reproduced Pedrell's letter verbatim to enable readers to become acquainted with his ideas.

journals, thereby creating a shared space free of political or aesthetic divisions. To illustrate the unity he envisioned, Tello presented a list of what he called the ‘first-rate stars’ of Mexico’s musical world:

Antonio María Carrasco, Melesio Morales, Félix María Alcérreca, Gustavo E. Campa, José E. Velazco, José C. Camacho, José Rivas, Miguel Ríos Toledano, Tomás León, Julio Ituarte, Ruperto Betancourt, Cristóbal Reyes, Librado Suárez, Pablo Sánchez, Presbítero Ignacio León, José Soto, Juan Luzuriaga, José Betancourt, Clemente Aguirre, Encarnación Payén and other notable figures.¹⁵

First, it provides a snapshot of the musicians active in Mexico during the 1880s—many of whom remain little studied today, as later generations of composers such as Ricardo Castro and Felipe Villanueva have attracted far greater scholarly attention. Of those mentioned, only four—Melesio Morales, Tomás León, Julio Ituarte, and Campa—have received sustained critical interest. Second, the list offers a counterpoint to Campa’s later essay ‘La música en México’. In that article, Campa denounced ‘inept teachers’ and ‘ignorant musicians’ without naming them; by contrast, Tello’s enumeration provides us with a concrete sense of the figures shaping Mexico’s musical life at the time. Finally, the inclusion of composers from Mexico City who were known to be at odds with one another reveals Tello’s deeper ambition of fostering reconciliation and collective purpose.

At the close of his letter, Ramírez Tello expressed the hope that these artists would bring their full talents to bear in persuading readers of the quality of Mexican art. Pedrell, replying in the *Ilustración*, welcomed this vision and voiced optimism that the ‘beautiful ideal’ would indeed be realised, noting with satisfaction that American artists were already responding to his call. He celebrated the fact that Spaniards were finally beginning to pronounce the names of Mexican and Cuban musicians such as Hubert de Blanck, Eugenio Burés, Serafín Ramírez, Desvernine, Morales de Valverde, Brindis de Sala, and José White.¹⁶

The fraternal dialogue between Pedrell and Ramírez Tello, though brief, provides crucial context for understanding the intellectual currents of the late nineteenth century. It testifies to an ambitious project of transatlantic cultural unification, grounded in an ideal of Latin identity rather than in the legacies of colonialism. While Pedrell’s call was framed from a Spanish vantage point, it was taken up with enthusiasm by Ramírez Tello, whose response reveals both the vitality and the fractures of Mexico’s musical community. This exchange thus stands as a prologue to the more polemical debates that would soon erupt under the influence of Campa.

¹⁵ ‘[...]y otras muchas notabilidades,’ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Finding an Artistic Ally

On 8 June 1888, Gustavo Campa wrote the first letter of a long correspondence to Felipe Pedrell in Barcelona.¹⁷ The young Mexican composer congratulated the editor of the *Ilustración* for the beauty of its format and the artistic ideals exposed in its first issue. For Campa, the ideals expressed in the *Ilustración* provided a philosophical framework—one centred on the notion of art as a religion and the composer's mission to solve the problems of modernity—for his own artistic convictions which had been languishing since the recent closure of the Instituto Musical Campa–Hernández Acevedo—a private school of music with progressive ideals intended to compete with the National Conservatoire of Music in Mexico City.¹⁸

In the introductory article, 'To Our Readers,' Pedrell stated the publication's mission: to become a space for discussing ideas and to restore Art to its rightful position. He argued that art had been trivialized by a secular and consumerist society, and therefore, music critics had a duty to enrich the discussion through diversity and impartiality. According to Pedrell:

If all manifestations of Art are good, provided they are animated by the sacred fire of inspiration—kindled by love and faith—then loyal impartiality advises the man destined to judge them to distrust his own verdicts, and not to be deceived as to the true weight of his opinions when set against those that are hostile to his own.¹⁹

Pedrell's text likely served as a validation of Campa's own mission, giving him new courage to express his views on the 'backwardness' of Mexican musical culture in his June 1888 article, 'La música en México'.

Pedrell's preface identified what he considered the principal issues facing modern art. In the first part, he argued that the trivialisation, secularisation, and commodification of art had devalued artists who aspired to create 'noble' and 'sacred' works. He criticised ephemeral trends, the abuse of art, and the pursuit of fame through modern magazines (*gacetillas*), arguing that they had caused society to lose its connection to 'eternal Art'. Despite these challenges, Pedrell offered an optimistic outlook: he believed these problems were temporary and could be overcome by re-embracing art's divine qualities. He proposed that the cultivation of art should replace its commercialisation, and that artists should create out of love—one of the highest

¹⁷ Gustavo E. Campa, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 8 June 1888, 1, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/346.

¹⁸ See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for further discussion.

¹⁹ 'Si todas las manifestaciones del Arte son buenas, con tal de que las avive el fuego sagrado de la inspiración, que lo encienden el amor y la fe, la imparcialidad leal aconseja al hombre destinado a juzgarlas a que desconfíe de sus juicios y a que no se deje engañar sobre la verdadera importancia de sus opiniones puestas en frente de las que son hostiles a las suyas.' F. P. [Felipe Pedrell], 'A nuestros lectores. Introducción,' *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 1 (30 January 1888): 1.

forms of creation—not for vanity or fashion.²⁰ This ideal of art as a universal and unifying language was the philosophical basis for his fraternal call to Hispanic-American artists.

In the second part of the preface, Pedrell outlined specific guidelines to help artists unleash their creativity and fulfil their mission. He encouraged younger artists to have a good-quality education, to be inspired by faith rather than material gain, and to free themselves from rigid conventions to experiment creatively. He argued that these steps would help them create a true Art that was an antithesis to the frugality of fashion. Moreover, Pedrell encouraged young musicians to secure patronage for financial stability. These guidelines, influenced by romantic ideals, positioned the artist at the centre of social life and elevated the composer's status. Pedrell further developed his argument by using the allegory of the 'Art sisters,' depicting 'Music' as having a subservient role to 'Poetry' in opera for centuries. According to Pedrell, the separation of these arts allowed 'Music' to become an independent and intellectual activity, culminating in the 'splendid development' of the symphonic style. Finally, Pedrell listed seven 'eternal qualities' of Art, including its equivalence to love, its tranquil nature, its power to move the imagination, and its divine character. These qualities, a blend of German idealism and Catholic doctrine, culminate in Pedrell's conclusion that 'Art is a religion of love'.²¹ Under these ideals, Pedrell invited music critics and intellectuals to contribute to the cause of Art.

This idealistic vision resonated with Campa, who, since his early days as a music critic, had championed the progress of Mexican art. Pedrell's text served as a validation of Campa's own mission, providing him with a new philosophical framework and fresh courage to articulate his views. Pedrell's position against the trivialization of art, for example, directly aligned with Campa's staunch rejection of artists who sought public approval and applause. In his writings, Campa had often mocked pianists, singers, and composers for being more concerned with the audience's acclaim than with remaining faithful to their art. This conviction found a powerful echo in Pedrell's preface, likely emboldening Campa to express his views on the 'backwardness' of Mexican musical culture in his June 1888 article, 'La música en México'.

The notion of art as a universal language helped explain the Mexican composers' impetus to professionalize music and educate audiences in instrumental repertoire, a topic explored in detail in previous chapters. However, Pedrell's guidelines for fulfilling the artist's mission were only partially applicable to the realities most musicians in Mexico faced. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, artistic patronage in Mexico was often sporadic. Since the nation-state was being built on liberal ideals, the institutionalization of music often relied on

²⁰ Ibid., 2.

²¹ Amanda García Fernández-Escárzaga, *El pensamiento estético de Felip Pedrell: principales influencias filosóficas* (Master's thesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2018), 27, 51–58.

government financial support, which was not always guaranteed. Furthermore, while Mexican composers rarely embraced the philosophical aspects of art as a religious discourse, they did adopt its vocabulary. Campa, for instance, continuously promoted the romantic notion of the composer as a ‘priest of Art,’ the artist as a member of a ‘brotherhood of apostles,’ and music as a sacred force with a profound social impact.

The ideals of the *Ilustración* reveal that Campa found in Pedrell a spiritual and ‘progressist’ ally. He was well aware that he was addressing an international artistic authority. In his first letter, Campa demonstrated his familiarity with Pedrell by citing references to him in Arthur Pougin’s supplement to François-Joseph Fétis’s *Biographie universelle des musiciens* and in Baltasar Saldoni’s *Efemérides*.²² Later, he passionately declared his desire to contribute to the progress of Art by offering his collaboration to the *Ilustración* and joining a group that shared his ideals. He wrote:

As I share in these ideals and sympathise with everything that signifies progress and seeks to make its way through the prejudices and routines that hinder it, I take pleasure in congratulating you and in offering my humble collaboration, considering it timely that our artistic qualities and defects, as well as the musical movement here—limited though it may still be—should be known in Spain, for it is not without a certain importance.²³

To demonstrate his literary competence, Campa enclosed his most recent article, ‘*Otello y Verdi*,’ published a year earlier, in 1887, in *La juventud literaria*. He concluded by requesting Pedrell’s opinion on his own compositions. Campa promised to send letters periodically, sometimes enclosing critical articles and music from his Mexican colleagues. This gesture, however, was not merely an offer of collaboration but also a strategic move: as the correspondence later revealed, Campa deliberately sent Pedrell works by fellow composers to expose what he considered their ‘inadequacy’—for instance, sending dances and other pieces of ‘poor quality,’ such as those of Ramírez Tello and Alcérreca.

As noted earlier, the *Ilustración* reached Campa at a moment of profound personal and professional crisis, offering him both a lifeline and an intellectual community when he most needed them. In several letters, Campa alluded to the precarious situation he faced in Mexico

²² François-Joseph Fétis and Arthur Pougin, ‘Pedrell (Felipe),’ *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*. Supplément et complément, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1880), 314; Baltasar Saldoni, ‘Pedrell, D. Felipe,’ *Diccionario biográfico-bibliográfico de efemérides de músicos españoles*, vol. 4 (Madrid: Imprenta de D. Antonio Pérez Dubrull, 1881), 246–47.

²³ ‘Cómo abundo en ellas y simpatizo en todo lo que signifiquen progreso y tiende a abrirse paso a través de las preocupaciones y rutinas que lo estancan, tengo la satisfacción de felicitarle y proponerle mi humilde colaboración, considerando oportuno que se conozcan en España, nuestras cualidades y defectos artísticos y el movimiento musical que se produzca que, no por ser limitado aún, carece de cierta importancia.’ Gustavo E. Campa, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 8 June 1888, 1, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/346.

City following the publication of ‘La música en México’. He explained that he had first encountered the *Ilustración* through a friend who shared the paper with him, though he did not specify when this occurred. Crucially, this discovery coincided with a period of failure: the imminent closure of the Instituto Musical Campa–Hernández Acevedo, which left him discouraged. In his first letter, Campa conveyed to Pedrell both his dissatisfaction with the lack of interest in the ideals he cherished and his frustration with the circumstances he faced. He insisted, however, that the failure of the Instituto was not due solely to his own shortcomings but also to broader historical conditions—Mexico’s cultural life, still distant from Europe, which he regarded as the birthplace of civilisation.

Campa consolidated his relationship with Pedrell by presenting himself as a persecuted yet visionary artist. Through his letters, Campa wove a narrative of personal victimhood and national artistic deficiency, positioning himself as both reformer and truth-teller. By highlighting conflicts with his music teacher Morales and by dismissing large sectors of Mexico’s musical life, Campa sought not only Pedrell’s sympathy but also validation of his own role as cultural critic. These rhetorical strategies, reinforced by the transmission of ‘La música en México,’ became central to the historiographical image of nineteenth-century Mexican music.

After the exchange of only a few letters, Campa and Pedrell forged an emotional bond, united by a profound empathy in their shared sense of being misunderstood artists. In his third letter, dated 20 August 1888, Campa gratefully acknowledged Pedrell’s praise of his article ‘Otello y Verdi’. He confessed how deeply honoured he felt to receive the attentive consideration of a European master, especially since, as he admitted, his essay ‘had been viewed with a certain indifference in my country.’²⁴

This sense of kinship deepened the following month. In his fourth letter, dated 27 September 1888, Campa portrayed himself as a persecuted figure—a former student now suffering reprisals from his teacher, Melesio Morales, the composer widely acclaimed as ‘the glory of Mexico.’ This represented a striking shift in narrative. Whereas in the autobiographical sketch he had enclosed with his second letter Campa had described Morales as ‘respected as one of the most intelligent teachers,’ he now confided to Pedrell a far more troubled and embittered account.²⁵

²⁴ ‘[el artículo] había sido visto con cierta indiferencia en mi país,’ Gustavo E. Campa, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 20 August 1888, 1, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/346.

²⁵ ‘[Melesio Morales] respetado como uno de los más inteligente profesores’ Gustavo E. Campa, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 1 August 1888, 6, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/346.

When Pedrell requested portraits of Morales and other Mexican composers for the *Ilustración*, Campa replied that he would gladly comply, yet did not dare to approach Morales directly, believing that his teacher had ‘unfairly disapproved’ of the young man’s conduct. He framed their discord as both personal and professional injustice:

My music teacher is the one who wages the harshest and most persistent war against my ideas, who censures me most severely, and who cannot tolerate that anyone should surpass him. My compositions have never once merited a word of praise from him; as for my writings, they so exasperate him that he seeks vengeance for them by every means at his disposal.²⁶

Here Campa cast himself as a victim: the grateful pupil whose path had been shaped by Morales’s instruction, yet whose refined artistic taste was now unjustly condemned by his mentor. This image of the ‘misunderstood genius’ was central to Campa’s reformist self-fashioning. On this point he found deep sympathy in Pedrell, who likewise lamented rejection by audiences and institutions—an affinity repeatedly invoked in their correspondence. Campa’s fervent words capture this emotional reciprocity:

What does it matter, dear Pedrell, if the public flees from us? What does it matter if it is degraded and debased, when sooner or later the hour of reparation must strike, as it has for so many others, and past sufferings shall vanish at the breath of the thousand delights the future has in store! I am among the most disheartened, and yet I take courage; I still have faith; I gather strength beneath the influence of your sound and fraternal counsel!²⁷

Such language reveals that Pedrell responded in kind, confirming that both saw themselves embarked upon the same embattled mission. The figure of the reformer out of step with his time—the dismissed genius—thus became a shared trope in their epistolary alliance, echoing themes examined earlier in Chapter Two.

Campa further reinforced his portrait of Mexico’s artistic deficiency by offering Pedrell a bleak panorama of musical life in the capital. Responding to Pedrell’s scholarly curiosity about popular songs and ancient cathedral repertoires—areas the Spaniard championed as essential to the progressive and national evolution of music²⁸—Campa dismissed their value outright. He

²⁶ ‘mi Sr. maestro es quien más cruda y continuada guerra hace a mis ideas, quien me censura más acremente, y quien no puede tolerar que nadie se le sobreponga. Mis composiciones jamás han merecido un halago suyo, y en cuanto a mis escritos, le exaltan a tal grave, que procura venganza de ellas por todos los medios que están a su alcance.’ Gustavo E. Campa, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 27 September 1888, 5, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/346.

²⁷ ‘¿Qué importa, querido Pedrell, que el público huya de nosotros! ¿Qué importa que esté degradado y envilecido, si tarda o temprano no debe sonar la hora de la reparación, como ha sanado para tantos otros, y los sufrimientos pasados quedarán desvanecidos al soplo de las mil dulzuras que reservan el porvenir! Yo soy de las más desanimados, y sin embargo aliento, tengo confianza aún, cobro ánimo bajo la influencia de sus sanos y fraternales consejos!’ Ibid., 2.

²⁸ On the recovery of past music and the return to Nature as integral to national popular music, see: Cristina Álvarez Losada, *El pensamiento musical de Felip Pedrell (1841–1922)* (Doctoral diss. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2017), 117–118 y 184–188.

argued instead that the ‘artistic movement’ in Mexico was slight and insignificant when measured against the great cultural currents of Europe.²⁹ In doing so, Campa did not simply report conditions but strategically crafted an image of deficiency that bolstered his self-appointed role as reformer and justified the authority he sought to claim abroad.

He claimed that research into popular song—understood in the folkloric sense—was not only lacking but unnecessary, since Mexican songs derived directly from Spanish sources, while pre-conquest music had been irretrievably lost.³⁰ He lamented the absence of a true ‘musical literature’: no substantial body of writings or criticism, no pedagogical materials such as solfeggio manuals or elementary treatises.³¹

Although acknowledging the abundance of music produced, he dismissed the greater part of it as mere ‘light music’ and dances, with only a handful of young composers venturing into other forms. These opinions aligned precisely with those he had already expressed in the Mexican press, especially in the article ‘La música en México,’ a copy of which he sent to Pedrell.³² While he did forward what he regarded as the best specimens, Campa underlined his own candour:

You have no idea how painful it is for me to give you such disconsolate news, all the more bitter because I love my country and would wish to say quite the opposite, proclaiming its artistic progress; but I cannot lie, nor place myself in false contradiction with what I affirm in the articles I enclose.³³

By such means Campa presented a coherent vision of Mexico’s musical culture—one he had already disseminated in the press, and which would continue to shape narratives of Mexican music history well into the late twentieth century.

Particularly revealing is the letter of 7 November 1888, in which Campa at last named those Mexican musicians he deemed responsible for artistic stagnation. The topic emerged after Pedrell revealed his intention of launching a biographical section on Mexican composers in the 1 January 1889 issue of the *Ilustración*. Campa, however, misunderstood the plan, imagining instead the creation of a new periodical for Mexico itself. He felt compelled to warn Pedrell that

²⁹ Gustavo E. Campa, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 8 June 1888, 1, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/346.

³⁰ Gustavo E. Campa, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 1 August 1888, 3, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/346.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ ‘No tiene Ud. idea de lo sensible que me es el darle tan desconsoladoras noticias, tanto más dolorosas cuanto que soy amante de mi país y desearía decir todo lo contrario, propagando su progreso artístico; pero no puedo mentir ni ponerme en falsa contradicción con lo que afirmo en los artículos que le acompaño.’ Gustavo E. Campa, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 1 August 1888, 4, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/346.

such an enterprise would inevitably fail for want of readership. With apologies for his frankness, he declared that he could provide no more than eight or ten biographies of composers whose works possessed true merit. He refused outright to include the biographical sketches of what he described as

the thousand individuals who constitute the artistic deadweight of our country—whether through routine, ignorance, or deceit. To exalt them would be to elevate what is most anti-artistic. [...] I am convinced that, however much impetus might be given to the *Ilustración*, its circulation throughout the nation would not exceed 200 to 300 copies. Every musical periodical attempted in Mexico has failed.³⁴

Although conceding the nobility of Pedrell's project, Campa accused Felipe Ramírez Tello, editor of *El polífono*, of deceiving Pedrell into believing that Mexico's artistic development was more advanced than it truly was.³⁵ For Campa, the list of musicians Ramírez Tello had provided in response to Pedrell's fraternal appeal was deeply misguided, as it included 'anti-progressive' figures who, in his judgment, 'rightly deserve to leave the community.'³⁶ Campa bristled at the omission of younger talents such as his friends Ricardo Castro, Juan Hernández Acevedo, Felipe Villanueva, and Benigno de la Torre, as well as the violinist Jacobo García Sagredo. Instead, Ramírez Tello had listed older faculty members of the National Conservatoire: '[José Cornelio] Camacho, author of the worst religious music ever written; [Miguel] Ríos Toledano, an ignorant director of a military band; Velasco and [Ruperto] Betancourt, very poor piano teachers; [José] Rivas, a good violinist but a determined enemy of progress.'³⁷ Campa promised Pedrell that he would soon forward further information and musical examples, so that his correspondent might judge for himself the character of these compositions.

Morales Writes to Pedrell

The correspondence between Campa and Pedrell took a decisive turn when Melesio Morales himself addressed the Spanish critic. Until this point, Campa had dominated the narrative, presenting Morales as a tyrannical teacher and Mexico as a stagnant artistic landscape.

³⁴ 'de los mil individuos que constituyen la rémora artística de nuestro país, ya por su rutina, por su ignorancia o por su falsedad. Eso equivaldría encumbrarles, y eso sería lo más antiartístico que podríamos intentar [...] Tengo el convencimiento de que, por mucho impulso que se le diera a la *Ilustración* su circulación en *todo* el país no pasaría de la de 200 a 300 ejemplares. Las pocas publicaciones musicales que se han intentado en México han fracasado todas,' Gustavo E. Campa, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 7 July 1888, 2, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/346.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶ 'con justicia merecen salir de la comunidad.' *Ibid.*

³⁷ '[José Cornelio] Camacho autor de la peor música religiosa que se ha escrito, corruptor del arte en nuestros templos, y organizador de las funciones religiosas que censuré acremente en mis artículos; de [Miguel] Ríos Toledano, director ignorante de una banda militar; de Velasco y [Ruperto] Betancourt, malísimos profesores de piano; de [José] Rivas, buen violinista, pero enemigo decidido del progreso.' *Ibid.*, 4.

Morales's intervention complicates the narrative by emerging as an intellectual combatant, who not only seeks to assert his position but also to elevate the discussion onto a wider historical and aesthetic stage. His letter marks the first open clash between two competing visions of Mexican music, with Pedrell positioned as arbiter of legitimacy.

On 23 November 1888, Morales wrote a formal letter to Pedrell requesting a copy of the *Ilustración*'s fifteenth issue, published in August of that year. Morales explained that the issue contained one of his articles, signed under the pseudonym *Páris*, which had first appeared in *El polífono* and was later reproduced in the *Ilustración* with Pedrell's commentary. Morales added that, although Campa had offered to show him the section, a meeting had not been possible due to Campa's schedule. Morales therefore requested that Pedrell send him the issue at his earliest convenience.³⁸ Pedrell, in turn, shared what he called Morales's 'impertinence' with Campa. In his reply of January 1889, Campa wrote that he was not surprised: he attributed Morales's attitude to envy and accused his former teacher of employing underhanded methods to attract Pedrell's attention.³⁹

The text Morales referred to was published in the *Ilustración*'s section for local and foreign news. It opened with his suggestion that the Mexican government should send the National Conservatoire's orchestra to compete at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle de Paris*.⁴⁰ Yet this article was only one of the motivations for Morales's intervention, since issue fifteen also contained other material that projected a distorted image of Mexico's cultural life. In what follows, I will first examine Pedrell's editorial comments on Campa's article 'La música en México,' then his praise of Campa's recent triumph in a composition competition, whose prize was the performance of his work at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*, and finally the debate on the Italian and Spanish schools that crystallised in the exchange between Morales and Pedrell. Together, these editorial decisions and polemical interventions reveal how Pedrell amplified

³⁸ 'Deseoso de conocer los comentarios que pudo merecer mi producción, me tomo la licencia de dirigir a Ud. la presente [...] que el número de la *Ilustración* a que Gustavo se refiere, me sea enviado lo más pronto posible.' Melesio Morales, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 23 November 1888, 1, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/964. In the letter, Morales refers to Campa by his first name, Gustavo, a choice that suggests familiarity while subtly placing his ex-student in a subordinate position.

³⁹ Gustavo E. Campa, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 20 January 1889, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/346.

⁴⁰ 'laudable y patriótico deseo,' 'Varia,' *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 15 (30 August 1888): 120. Morales stated that his article had first appeared in *El Polífono*. However, given the circulation of similar writings—including Campa's 'La música en México,' published in *El Nacional*, reprinted in *La juventud literaria*, and only later reproduced in *El Polífono*—it is possible that Morales's text also originated in a Mexico City newspaper before reaching the provincial press. To date, however, no copy of this earlier publication has been located.

Campa's voice while diminishing Morales's authority, thereby offering to European readers a partial picture of Mexico's musical culture.

In 'La música en México' Campa harshly criticised the state of Mexico's musical culture. He held music teachers and the dominance of the Italian school responsible for an apparent lack of progress (his analysis of the narratives around Italian music in 1888 and 1889 will be addressed in the following chapter). In this piece, Campa surveyed the state of different musical institutions. To show the similarities between Mexico and Spain, Pedrell quoted in issue fifteen of the *Ilustración* Campa's description of musical practices in the Mexican church. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the attention lies on Pedrell's alignment with a particular aesthetic position and his endorsement of Campa's vision of Mexico rather than on ecclesiastical practices. The intention was to underscore how the dominance of the Italian school perpetuated outdated traditions within official institutions.

In Campa's quotation, Pedrell chose to add five sarcastic footnotes to signal his agreement with the critique. First, Pedrell responded to Campa's complaint that non-sacred musical genres were performed in Mexican churches—Italian opera, zarzuela, *buffa*, *opéra-comique*, dances, and even national songs—by remarking: 'What a coincidence! Mr. Campa is a sorcerer: he has guessed exactly what goes on here. Amazing!'.⁴¹ Second, Campa had complained that the 'elevated' repertoire was ignored and that, instead, church organisers favoured Italianate masses by Luigi Rossi, Luigi Bordese, and Mexican Antonio Valle. To this Pedrell added, ironically, the question of whether Mexicans too had to endure Bordese's music: 'Yet another coincidence!'⁴² Campa also lamented that the 'maestros de capilla' ignored the 'superior' works of Bach, Handel, Mozart, Cherubini, Gounod, and Saint-Saëns, noting that audiences would never hear 'those superb creations, the fruit of lofty inspiration and imbued with unction and mysticism, unique models of their kind.'⁴³ Pedrell wryly commented that Spanish musicians destroyed those works every afternoon simply because they could, to underscore the irony: on the one hand, musicians who lacked the skill to perform such 'elevated' repertoire, and on the other, their irreverence toward what 'priests of Art' like Pedrell and Campa revered. Finally, Campa denounced the problem of 'improvisation,' a point on which Pedrell fully agreed. By this term Campa referred to several performing practices such as the organists' 'fanciful improvisations'⁴⁴ on cavatinas from *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Semiramide*, or

⁴¹ '¡Habrás visto coincidencia como esta! El Sr. Campa es un brujo: ha adivinado lo que pasa por aquí. ¡Vaya!', 'Bibliografía,' *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 15 (30 August 1888): 119.

⁴² '¡Otra coincidencia!' Ibid.

⁴³ 'esas soberbias creaciones fruto de elevada inspiración é impregnadas de unción y misticismo, modelos únicos en su género.' Ibid.

⁴⁴ Campa used the term 'lucubraciones,' which in Spanish carries a pejorative sense of affected, pseudo-profound digressions, here used to ridicule the tasteless exuberance of such improvisations.

Nabucco; the use of percussion instruments such as the *chinesco*, *tam-tam*, and piano in solemn masses, or the insertion of improvised solos laden with fermatas and bel canto ornamentation. Pedrell added his own caricature of the practice: ‘Here too we ‘nabuccone’ and ‘trovatore’ to excess, not to mention the thunderous noises we produce on the organ and the bird-like vocal flourishes of every kind we make it emit—sparrows, nightingales, rooks, and all manner of birds.’⁴⁵ With this, Campa and Pedrell mocked the hegemony of the Italian school that permeated ecclesiastical practice on both sides of the Atlantic.

Another episode that illustrates Pedrell’s editorial partiality was his treatment of Campa’s *Fuga en cuatro partes con acompañamiento de orquesta*. In issue fifteen, Pedrell reproduced a note from *El polífono* announcing Campa’s victory in a composition competition whose prize was the performance of the work at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris.⁴⁶ The article emphasised Campa’s distinction while noting that the piece had been dedicated to Morales—a passing reference that contrasted with the repeated signs of support offered to Campa. In reality, press reports show that the *Fuga* was not performed with orchestra, but replaced in the programme by two other works by Campa.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, by foregrounding this information in the *Ilustración*, Pedrell once again presented Campa to European readers as a champion of progress in Mexican music, confirming his role as an ally and amplifying his authority while diminishing Morales’s standing.

By publishing both Campa’s critique of Mexican institutions and the reports of his success, Pedrell legitimised the young composer and, at the same time, gave him the support he needed to move from a marginalised critic at home to an authoritative voice abroad. It was the circulation of Campa’s voice in an international forum that provoked Morales’s indignation and, later, Ildefonso de Olano’s intervention (further discussed in this chapter). Both feared that Pedrell was mistaking a partisan view for the reality of Mexico’s cultural landscape.

⁴⁵ ‘También *nabucodonoseamos* por aquí, y hasta *trovatoreamos*, eso sin contar las tronadas que armamos con el órgano y las pasadas oritológico-vocales de todo género que le hacemos producir, en las cuales oíría V. gorriones, ruiseñores, grajos y toda suerte de pájaros.’ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ This episode illustrates how Pedrell presented an inaccurate account of Mexico’s musical culture, relying exclusively on the testimony of Campa and *El Polífono*. Further research on the competition is required; however, contemporary press reports contradict the note published in *El Polífono*, which had announced that the *Fuga Coral* would be performed with orchestral accompaniment on 16 July. In fact, the organisers later announced changes to the programme: Campa’s *Fuga* was omitted for lack of time, while two other works by him—an *Himno Sinfónico* and a *Pastorale*—were performed instead. Everything indicates that the *Fuga* was never performed at the Exposition Universelle of 1889. For announcements in the daily press, see: ‘El Certamen literario musical,’ *El municipio libre*, 13 July 1888, 3; ‘El Sr. Gustavo E. Campa premiado,’ *El diario del hogar*, 15 July 1888, 3; ‘Certamen musical,’ *El tiempo*, 15 July 1888, 4; ‘Certamen,’ *El municipio libre*, 16 July 1888, 3; Héctor [José Ricardo del Castillo], ‘Eco de la semana,’ *La patria ilustrada*, 23 July 1888, 350.

Beyond the question of personal legitimacy, however, the dispute soon turned to matters of aesthetic ideology. The central issue was no longer Campa's position in Mexico, but Morales's defence of the Italian school against Pedrell's construction of a modern Spanish identity.

The disagreement, however, stemmed from Morales's further claim that Mexico had benefitted from adopting the Italian school over the Spanish in the nineteenth century. Since Pedrell paraphrased much of the text (the only access to Morales's article is therefore through his editorial mediation), the complete argument is difficult to reconstruct; nevertheless, his choice to quote and rebut a particular 'insulting' statement makes clear the point at which the quarrel started.

According to Morales, Mexicans had managed to free themselves from 'the routine of the Spanish [school], exchanging Eximeno's rules for the foundations of the Italian school, generator of universal taste and the only one possible and suitable for the morbid nature of the Mexican people.'⁴⁸ He added that even Berlioz and Wagner had drawn upon the 'purest source' of the Italian tradition—a point he frequently invoked to defend Italian primacy. To Pedrell, this was an untenable argument. A known champion of Wagner in Barcelona, he associated Wagner's music with reform and progress;⁴⁹ Morales's aesthetic ideals, in his view, were antiquated.

Pedrell responded by presenting the Spanish school as a historical force whose influence extended far beyond the Iberian Peninsula. He criticized Morales for reducing its glory to two composers, Manuel Antonio de Corral and José Manuel Delgado. Pedrell conceded that if their influence in Mexico had been as Morales described, then Morales was justified in 'to describe as fatal their influence [that of Corral and Delgado] on the education of a people as gifted for Music as that of Mexico, since, in reality, they were incapable of exerting any influence at all.'⁵⁰ For Pedrell, neither Corral nor Delgado could embody the 'golden age of Spanish music,' which was represented instead by polyphonists such as Francisco Guerrero, Tomás Luis de Victoria, and Andreas de Silva.⁵¹ This distinction reveals that while Pedrell invoked the

⁴⁸ 'la rutina (de la escuela) española, trocando las reglas de Eximeno por las bases de la escuela italiana, generadora del gusto universal y única posible y conveniente de la índole mórbida del pueblo mexicano,' *Varia, Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 15 (30 August 1888): 120.

⁴⁹ Clinton D. Young, 'The Southern Slope of Monsalvat: How Spanish Wagnerism Became Catalan,' *19th-Century Music* 41, no. 1 (Summer 2017): 31–47.

⁵⁰ 'calificar de fatal su influjo en la educación de un pueblo tan apto para la Música como el de México, porque, en realidad, no pudieron influir en nada,' *Varia, Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 15 (30 August 1888): 120.

⁵¹ Morales mentioned Manuel Antonio de Corral (1790–?) and José Manuel Delgado (1747–1819), both active in New Spain during the late colonial period. Pedrell, by contrast, referred to Renaissance polyphonists such as Francisco Guerrero (1528–1599), Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548–1611), Andreas de

Renaissance as the foundation of a glorious Spanish past, Morales was referring to composers born in eighteenth-century New Spain, at a time when Mexico did not yet exist as a nation-state.⁵² The debate was therefore not merely about aesthetic ideals but about conflicting national narratives. For Pedrell, the issue was the construction of a modern Spanish identity rooted in imperial grandeur;⁵³ Morales, by contrast, invoked a colonial past aligned with the Mexican liberal discourse of an independent nation—a past that Pedrell systematically elided in his writings.

In his rebuttal, Pedrell went further by invoking Antonio Eximeno (1729-1808), the Jesuit exile whose *Dell'origine e delle regole della musica* (1774) had long been a touchstone for his own historical thought.⁵⁴ When Morales claimed that 'It was impossible for Mexican youth to exchange Eximeno's rules for the foundations of the Italian school, for the simple reason that Eximeno himself had been a convinced herald of that very school.'⁵⁵ Pedrell countered that such a claim was impossible for the 'simple reason' that those very foundations had already been laid by Eximeno himself. For Pedrell, Eximeno was not a relic but a visionary: 'the first to speak of popular taste in music, and to suggest that upon the basis of national song each people should build its own system.'⁵⁶ Through this reading, Eximeno became, in Pedrell's eyes, a *remover of ideas*, a figure who anticipated modern theories of musical expression and even foreshadowed Wagner in his conception of dramatic declamation and 'pure or symphonic music.'⁵⁷

Silva (c.1475/80–c.1530), Juan Escribano (c.1480–1557), Melchor Robledo (c.1510–1586), Andrés de Torrentes (1510–1580), and Francisco de Peñalosa (1470–1528).

⁵² Mexico's War of Independence (1810–1821) marked the transition from colonial New Spain to the independent Mexican nation-state.

⁵³ This effort to construct the notion of a 'Spanish music' was central to nineteenth-century intellectual movements; see Juan José Carreras, 'La invención de la música española,' in *Historia de la música en España e Hispanoamérica, vol. 5: La música en España en el siglo XIX*, ed. Juan José Carreras (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2018), 161. On the concerns of composers such as Pedrell regarding the continuation of the Spanish school, see: 161; on the discourses on Spanish music later formulated by Pedrell and Falla at the beginning of the twentieth century, see: 170.

⁵⁴ On Pedrell's appropriation of Eximeno, see: Álvarez Losada, *El pensamiento musical de Felip Pedrell*, 142–45.

⁵⁵ 'Además que no pudo trocar la juventud mexicana las reglas de Eximeno por las bases de la escuela italiana por la sencilla razón de que Eximeno fue el preconizador convencido de la escuela italiana,' 'Varia,' *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 15 (30 August 1888): 120.

⁵⁶ 'el primero en hablar de gusto popular en la Música, y en insinuar que sobre la base del canto nacional debía construir cada pueblo su sistema,' in Felip Pedrell, *Diccionario biográfico-bibliográfico de músicos y escritores de música españoles, portugueses e hispano-americanos antiguos y modernos*, vol. 1 (Barcelona: Tipografía de Francisco Irisarri, 1897), 624; cited in Álvarez Losada, *El pensamiento musical de Felip Pedrell*, 143.

⁵⁷ 'a pesar de que, dada la época en que se produjo estas circunstancias, no amengua esto su fama, antes bien la encumbra, pues, Eximeno expuso y mantuvo ideas que todavía hoy nos parecen revolucionarias si se considera que no sólo se adelantó a sus contemporáneos sino al mismísimo Wagner en la manera de concebir el drama musical y hasta la Música pura o sinfónica,' 'Varia,' *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 15 (30 August 1888): 120.

Both Morales and Pedrell used the term ‘Italian school’ loosely to denote the *bel canto* repertoire—Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi—yet their appeals to Eximeno reveal deeper divergences. Morales invoked him merely to highlight a historical transition towards Italian taste in Mexico, whereas Pedrell appropriated him as part of a longer genealogy of Jesuit intellectuals—Juan Andrés, Javier Llampillas, Eximeno—who collectively prefigured Wagner and legitimised the project of a Spanish national drama.⁵⁸ The controversy thus lay not in Eximeno himself, but in what he represented: for Morales, a set of antiquated rules wisely abandoned in favour of Italian taste; for Pedrell, a visionary precursor who legitimised Spain’s historical primacy and supplied a genealogy for his nationalist project. By invoking Eximeno, each side turned the Jesuit theorist into a weapon in a broader struggle over cultural authority. As Pedrell admonished Morales: ‘Read and study carefully the works of the famous Eximeno, and you will gladly rectify the error of appreciation into which you have fallen when speaking of the Spanish school.’⁵⁹

Olano’s Open Letter to Pedrell

In July 1889, Campa alerted Pedrell to an ‘annoying letter’ published in the Mexican daily *El tiempo*. The author, who hid behind the pseudonym ‘Ildefonso de Olano,’ had launched a sustained attack against Campa in twelve instalments that appeared between June and November. Olano’s aim was twofold: to challenge the biographical sketch that Pedrell had published on Campa earlier that year, and to question the legitimacy of Campa’s provocative article ‘La música en México,’ which the *Ilustración musical hispano-americana* had reprinted in the summer of 1888. Campa presented himself to Pedrell as the victim of ‘low and vile malevolence,’ warning that his adversary sought not only revenge but also to compromise Pedrell by association.⁶⁰

The author’s true identity remains uncertain. Campa suspected that his teacher and adversary Morales was behind the pseudonym, but no conclusive evidence has ever been found.⁶¹ Rather than his real identity, what is most revealing is how the letters convey the atmosphere of suspicion and factionalism in Mexico’s musical world.

⁵⁸ Álvarez Losada, *El pensamiento musical de Felip Pedrell*, 143.

⁵⁹ ‘Lea y estudie [...] con detención las obras del célebre Eximeno y rectificará con gusto ese error de apreciación en que ha incurrido al hablar de la escuela española,’ ‘Varia,’ *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 15 (30 August 1888): 120.

⁶⁰ ‘con una malevolencia rastrera e infame, se ha ejercido sobre mí una benganza villana, pretendiendo comprometer a usted de paso.’ Gustavo E. Campa, letter to Felipe Pedrell, 27 July 1889, 2, in *Correspondència de Felip Pedrell, 1847–1927*, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Ms. 946/346.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Olano justified his intervention as a defence of the teachers whom Campa had disparaged in 'La música en México'. Whereas many of them had preferred to remain silent in 1888, Olano now insisted it was 'imperative' to respond once their reputation had been questioned in the international press.⁶² He accused Campa of having treated his colleagues with arrogance, of exposing domestic disagreements abroad rather than addressing them privately, and of misrepresenting the reality of musical life in Mexico. This was not the first time that Campa's article had provoked indignation. Earlier in the chapter, I examined how Campa's article circulated in both local and international press, shaping perceptions of Mexico as a musical nation. Olano's intervention shows that for Mexican teachers the real offence was not merely the criticism itself but its international resonance: Campa's words, once reprinted abroad, compromised the professional reputation of the Conservatoire on a much larger stage.

More fundamentally, Olano contested the pedestal on which Pedrell had placed Campa. In Mexico, he insisted, Campa was an average composer, undeserving of the authority that Pedrell had conferred upon him.⁶³ To belittle the young critic, Olano invoked the examples of Rossini, Meyerbeer, Berlioz and Wagner, who had allegedly spoken unjustly against their peers. The factual accuracy of these anecdotes is irrelevant; what matters is the rhetorical move. By suggesting that even the 'sacred' European masters displayed jealousy and arrogance, Olano framed Campa's defects as part of human nature—though implicitly reminding his readers that the true measure of authority still resided in Europe.

This rhetorical strategy resonates with a broader pattern we have already encountered in previous chapters: Mexican critics frequently bolstered their arguments by citing canonical European figures, regardless of factual accuracy. In doing so, they reproduced a colonial dynamic in which authority flowed from the cultural centre to the periphery, and where disputes in Mexico were validated through the invocation of European names.

This confrontation between Olano and Pedrell encapsulates the polarised perceptions of Campa in late nineteenth-century Mexico. On one side, Olano sought to undermine Campa by appealing to Pedrell's impartiality and invoking the authority of the European canon to expose the young critic's arrogance. On the other, Pedrell transformed the same qualities into virtues, presenting Campa as a reformer and martyr whose struggles symbolised the path of modern music in Mexico. These two discourses—delegitimisation through European comparison and canonisation through European endorsement—highlight the central paradox of Campa's position: his authority in Mexico depended on recognition abroad.

⁶² 'justicia a los que sufrimos entonces del articulista aquella carrera de baquetas y ahora de usted, este inexplicable vapuleo,' Ildefonso de Olano, 'Cartas musicales,' *El tiempo*, 23 July 1889, 2.

⁶³ Ibid.

For Olano, Pedrell's support of Campa was based on arbitrary information. The biography of Campa that appeared in the *Ilustración musical hispano-americana* in January 1889 closely followed the material that Campa himself had sent to Barcelona,⁶⁴ including a published biography, a self-written autobiographical sketch, several compositions, and the controversial article 'La música en México'. Pedrell made only minor adjustments in style, but Olano interpreted this as a sign of bias: rather than reporting impartially, Pedrell had simply reproduced Campa's own version of events.

It is worth recalling that Pedrell had chosen to inaugurate the new section on Mexican composers with Campa. Earlier in this chapter we saw how Campa interpreted this as an opportunity: assuming that Pedrell was planning to launch a Mexican periodical, he crafted a self-portrait that stressed the country's backwardness in order to justify his role as reformer. From Olano's perspective, however, the same gesture revealed Pedrell's public endorsement of Campa. By dedicating the first instalment of the new section to him, and by presenting what Olano perceived as an inflated image, Pedrell appeared to invest the young composer with an authority that few in Mexico were willing to concede.

Pedrell, however, went further than reproducing biographical details. He used his editorial authority to defend and elevate Campa. First, he underscored their intellectual brotherhood, openly stating that he admired Campa both as a man and as an artist.

I say this without hesitation or circumlocution: I possess the full intimacy of the Mexican artist who is the subject of these lines; I am honoured by his frank and loyal friendship; I admire him as a man and as an artist. If in portraying the moral man I am compelled to violate the secrecy of our intimate and artistic correspondence—because in it the man is admirably depicted—on the other hand, the worth and significance of the artist in the history of his country's Art secure my judgment, for his works themselves demonstrate it, and demonstrate it to those who have eyes to see and intelligence to judge with severe impartiality.

Though we are far distant from one another, I have been able to know the man through his ideas and the artist through his works. For this reason, I flatter myself that I have come to know a sincere, intelligent, enthusiastic, enlightened artist, a lover of progress and of the glory of his noble country, with whom we share so many moral and intellectual bonds—qualities that earn him my deepest sympathy.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Felipe Pedrell, 'Artistas mexicanos. Gustavo E. Campa,' *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, no. 24 (15 January 1889): 1–2.

⁶⁵ 'Dígolo sin ambages ni rodeos. Poseo toda la intimidad del artista mexicano objeto de estas líneas: me honro con su amistad franca y leal: admírole como hombre y como artista. Si el retrato del hombre moral me fuerza a violar el secreto de nuestra correspondencia íntima y artística, porque el hombre sale en ella admirablemente dibujado, en cambio, la valía y significación del artista en la Historia del Arte de su país asegúrame la posesión de mi juicio porque ahí están sus obras para demostrarla y para demostrarla a los que tienen ojos para ver e inteligencia para juzgar con severa imparcialidad. Estamos muy distantes uno del otro, pero he podido conocer al hombre por sus ideas y al artista por sus obras. Por lo mismo me lisonjeo de haber trabado conocimiento con un artista sincero, inteligente, entusiasta, ilustrado, amante del progreso y de la gloria de su bello país, con el cual nos unen tantos vínculos morales e intelectuales, cualidades que merecen mi más profunda simpatía.' *Ibid.*

This fraternal language placed them in the same camp of reformers, recalling the anti-philistine stance later associated with Schumann's *Davidsbündler*.

Second, Pedrell's voice carried the weight of European endorsement. In the Mexican cultural imagination, Spain was part of the European centre, and its support endowed Campa with a universal legitimacy that he could not have acquired locally. Unable to complete his studies in a European conservatoire, Campa strategically sought validation from European authorities; Pedrell's support fulfilled this need. By positioning Campa as a reformer misunderstood by his compatriots, Pedrell projected the trope of the modern artist whose genius was only recognised abroad.

Third, Pedrell contributed to Campa's elevation as both composer and critic. He highlighted Campa's participation in public events such as the inauguration of the *Biblioteca Nacional* in 1884, where his *Himno Sinfónico* was performed alongside works by Morales and Castro, citing contemporary press reports as evidence of Campa's stature.⁶⁶ He also described Campa's *Soupir* with poetic admiration, reworking Campa's own words into a quasi-confessional dialogue that stressed their shared sensibility. Through such commentary Pedrell presented Campa not merely as a promising young composer, but rather reinforced the image of him as a 'priest of Art,' a figure who endured local hostility for the sake of progress—an image that had been crucial to his public profile since the early stages of his career.⁶⁷

This elevation carried particular weight in Campa's career: unlike Morales, who had completed his studies in Italy, or other colleagues who trained in Paris and Rome, Campa lacked the foreign credential that often sealed a composer's place in the Mexican canon. Pedrell, acting as a European authority, provided precisely that endorsement: his voice elevated Campa from a promising local talent to a figure officially inscribed in Mexico's musical canon. In doing so, Pedrell not only reframed Campa's polemical posture as noble self-sacrifice, but also performed the act of consecration that Campa's unfinished European training had denied him.

Pedrell's portrait thus reframed Campa's polemical posture as noble self-sacrifice. The very qualities that Olano castigated—arrogance, aggressiveness, disdain for colleagues—were inverted into signs of conviction, courage, and fidelity to higher artistic ideals. In Pedrell's hands, the controversial critic became a modern martyr, embodying the struggles of artistic progress in a peripheral nation seeking legitimacy through European authority.

⁶⁶ See Chapter 2, where I analyse how Campa and Castro were included among the leading Mexican composers at the inauguration of the *Biblioteca Nacional*.

⁶⁷ See Chapter 2, on the construction of Campa's early public image as a 'priest of Art.'

Thus, while Pedrell's voice offered Campa the consecration that his unfinished European training had denied him, Olano's letters sought to dismantle precisely that elevation. The clash between these two narratives—canonisation and delegitimisation—did not merely concern the reputation of a young composer; it consolidated the wider tensions over authority, progress, and cultural allegiance that defined Mexico's musical debates in the late nineteenth century.

This chapter has examined the alliance between Gustavo Campa and Felipe Pedrell within the broader transatlantic networks of 1888–1889, and placed into perspective the narratives and authority that later scholars attributed to Campa throughout the twentieth century. From Pedrell's initial dialogue with Felipe Ramírez Tello and his call for Hispanic-American fraternity, to Campa's letters that combined reformist zeal with narratives of victimhood, we have seen how ideals of progress and cosmopolitanism were mobilised across centre–periphery divides. Campa used this exchange to portray himself as a herald of reform, while Pedrell validated him as a 'priest of Art,' publishing his writings in the *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*.

Yet this symbolic elevation provoked strong reactions in Mexico City. Morales defended the Italian tradition and Olano's letters sought to dismantle Campa's authority, turning the same traits that Pedrell admired into proof of arrogance and pretension. These clashes reveal how cultural authority in nineteenth-century Mexico was shaped less by local consensus than by transnational endorsement, exposing the paradoxes of a peripheral scene that measured itself against European standards while seeking its own modernity. Reconstructing these polemics shows how the figure of Campa emerged from a contested field of voices where reformist ideals, institutional rivalries, and international validations intertwined. The next chapter follows this paradox into the disputes over the modern Italian school, tracing how Wagnerian discourse was reinterpreted through a Latin sensibility to which Mexican critics claimed allegiance.

Chapter 4 Latin Modernists, and Wagnerian Discourses: Intellectual Networks in the Mexican Musical Press (1888–1889)

In 1876, a group of distinguished individuals gathered at the Festspielhaus restaurant in Bayreuth to celebrate the premiere of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and the triumph of its author, Richard Wagner. The Italian critic Filippo Filippi recounted the details of that evening in his *Secondo viaggio nelle regioni dell'avvenire*. Among the gifts and conversations, Filippi described a profoundly symbolic gesture: Giovanna Lucca, wife of the publisher who held the rights to Wagner's music in Italy, placed a silver crown upon the composer's head:

Signora Lucca presented Wagner with a silver crown, which she placed on his head to the applause of the entire hall. It was a well-timed gesture, and everyone marvelled at the fact that the crown, offered to Wagner, came from Italy—placed by Italian hands upon the head of the German maestro. Let those who wish to shudder do so, but to me, that crown seemed to sit very well on the head of the author of the *Nibelungen*.¹

This symbolic gesture not only celebrated Wagner's personal triumph but consecrated him—by Italian hands—as the father of musical modernity, pressuring even Italian cultural elites to acknowledge the growing German influence in the operatic world.² Through narratives such as this, progressive musicians argued that even in Italy, composers had begun to break away from the bel canto tradition and align themselves with the new Wagnerian school. Such claims, however, were more rhetorical than factual. Bel canto practices continued to shape operatic life in Italy well into the late nineteenth century, but for progressive critics abroad the claim that even Italians were turning Wagnerian served as a powerful polemical device.

This image of symbolic recognition also resonated beyond Europe: in Mexico, by the 1880s, the traditional Italian school, represented by Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and the young Verdi, still dominated the musical tastes of Mexican audiences. For Mexican progressives, this 'domination' was increasingly problematic, as it was considered outdated. In 'La música en

¹ 'La signora Lucca presentò una corona d'argento al Wagner, che gliela pose in testa in mezzo agli applausi di tutta la sala. La cosa è riuscita bene, con opportunità, e tutti facevano le meraviglie che quella corona, al Wagner, venisse dall'Italia, posta da mano italiana sul capo del maestro tedesco. Frema di orrore chi vuole, ma a me quella corona sembrava che stesse molto bene sul capo dell'autore dei *Nibelungi*.' Filippo Filippi, 'Secondo viaggio nelle regioni dell'avvenire,' in Joaquin Marsillach, *Ricardo Wagner* (Milano: Fratelli Dumolard, 1881), 257.

² From an Italian perspective, Lucca's gesture might also be read in light of her vested interests as Wagner's publisher in Italy. However, for the purpose of this chapter—written from a Mexican perspective—such details are irrelevant. What is meaningful here is the symbolic image of Wagner being crowned by Italian hands, an image that resonated with the broader debates on cultural authority explored in this chapter.

México' (1888), Gustavo Campa criticised his compatriots for clinging to what he regarded as an antiquated taste—music he called 'that of our grandparents.' In his view, this style belonged to the first half of the nineteenth century.³ The Mexican premieres of *La Gioconda*, *Otello*, and *Mefistofele* between 1885 and 1888 became occasions to debate not only the merits of Italian opera, but also the very definition of musical modernity in a country negotiating its place within the aspirational idea of a universal civilisation associated with the advanced nations. In Italy, these three works had been regarded as markers of change: Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* (1876) as a tentative step toward modernity, Verdi's *Otello* (1887) as a paradigmatic break with bel canto conventions, and Boito's *Mefistofele* (1875, rev.) as an experimental hybrid of Italian melodrama and Wagnerian aesthetics. The idea that a modern Italian school of opera had emerged—already partially Wagnerian—opened the door for critics to argue that Mexican preferences needed to evolve.

It is often emphasised that the Mexican public preferred Italian opera. However, the sociocultural and political implications of this preference have received comparatively little attention. Only recently have Latin American scholars begun to explore Italian influence not merely as a vehicle of European taste, but as a contested space where local modernising elites negotiated issues of tradition, progress, and cultural authority in nation-building processes.⁴ Within Mexico, moreover, Campa has often been portrayed as a Eurocentric ideologue who favoured French music in opposition to the Italian school.⁵ This approach tends to cast Campa as a peripheral musician who simply imitated the writings of French critics. Yet Campa also engaged with Spanish and Italian reformists who expressed similar concerns, revealing his participation in broader intellectual networks within the so-called civilised world to which Mexicans believed they belonged and with which they sought to engage.

³ Gustavo E. Campa, 'La música en México,' *El nacional*, 24 June 1888, 2. The article was published in three instalments: 8 July 1888, 2; 17 July 1888, 2. The literary magazine *La juventud literaria*—where Campa collaborated from 1887 to 1888—also reproduced 'La música en México' in the following issues: *La juventud literaria*, no. 11 (1 July 1888): 212–213; *La juventud literaria*, no. 29 (15 July 1888): 227–228; *La juventud literaria*, no. 30 (22 July 1888): 136–237.

⁴ Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality. Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Duke:University Press, 2014); José Manuel Izquierdo König, 'The Cosmopolitan Muse. Searching for Musical Style in Early Nineteenth-Century Latin America' in *Music History and Cosmopolitanism*, eds. Anastasia Belina, Kaarina Kilpiö, Derek B. Schott (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 59–73; Vera Wolkowicz, *Inca Music Reimagined: Indigenist Discourses in Latin American Art Music, 1910–1930* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); José Manuel Izquierdo König, *Kickstarting Italian Opera in the Andes: The 1840s and the First Opera Companies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

⁵ Jesús C. Romero, 'El francesismo en la evolución musical de México,' *Carnet Musical*, supplement 1, no. 4 (1949): 153–163; Gloria Carmona, 'Los artículos periodísticos de Ricardo Castro,' *Heterofonía*, no. 136–137 (2007): 87–95; Rogelio Álvarez Meneses, 'La presencia de México en la revista *Ilustración musical hispano-americana* a través de la correspondencia de Gustavo E. Campa,' *Cuadernos de música iberoamericana* 22 (July–December 2011), 123–150; Paulina Isabel Molina Díaz, *Ser mujer y escribir de música: la crítica musical del siglo XIX en la Ciudad de México a través del trabajo periodístico de Fanny Heron O'Reilly 'Titania'* (Master's thesis. Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2023).

At the same time, the opposition between Italian and German schools also reflected a nineteenth-century understanding of Mexican identity—an understanding that operated differently from the nationalist identity of the twentieth century that still predominates. As explored in Chapter One, the association of Mexican identity with the Italian school in opposition to the German was already being formulated earlier. To this layer we must now add the 1880s discourse on the old and the new, which posited that Mexicans had to relinquish their preference for the traditional Italian school if they wished to modernise, achieve progress, and join the universal civilisation of advanced nations.

Progressive Mexicans interpreted French Wagnerism as part of a broader Latin Wagnerism—one that could be adapted to the cultural realities of southern Europe and Latin America. In this chapter, I trace the ideas underpinning the opposition between the Italian and German schools. I begin by examining how the Mexican press addressed the traditional and modern Italian schools during the performances of *La Gioconda*, *Otello*, and *Mefistofele*, showing how Campa's arguments engaged with his local context. I then analyse Campa's writings to trace how he used French and Spanish critics in order to situate his ideas within a wider intellectual framework. Finally, I examine Morales's translation of Saint-Saëns, written in opposition to Campa's Wagnerian campaign, to show, first, that there was dissent even among the progressives, and second, that Mexicans adapted the ideas of those they regarded as 'European authorities'—reshaping them to their own agenda—in order to speak critically without being dismissed on account of their national origin.

As we will see, Campa's citation practices—sometimes imprecise, often eclectic—illustrate how he reassembled fragments from different European critics. At first glance, this could be read as inconsistency, but it rather reflects the situated logic of a peripheral intellectual seeking to legitimise his reformist position through borrowed authority. In a context where musical criticism lacked local institutional grounding, European names functioned not only as sources but as rhetorical instruments: their presence in the text was less about evidentiary rigour than about staking a claim in a transnational discourse where Mexican critics—whether in support or dissent—sought to articulate what kind of modernity should define their nation.

Mexican Readings of Progress and Decadence in the Italian School

Debates over the opposition between traditional and modern Italian opera were a recurring theme in the Mexican press during the 1880s. The annual Italian opera seasons, brought to Mexico by touring company of the Italian empresario Napoleón Sieni, premiered new works that opened up further discussions about progress and backwardness, particularly with

the performances of Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* in 1885, Verdi's *Otello* in 1887, and Boito's *Mefistofele* in 1888 at the National Theatre in Mexico City. Some critics and commentators presented these operas as steps along the path of musical progress initiated by Wagner, regardless of whether they endorsed or rejected that trajectory. Moreover, the press addressed a number of issues that shaped local musical taste: the enduring preference among Mexicans for the traditional Italian school; the idea that Mexican audiences were not yet prepared to engage with modern music due to a lack of musical education; and the notion that modern works such as *Gioconda*, *Otello*, and *Mefistofele*—by Italian composers—would serve to prepare Mexican listeners to begin understanding Wagner's allegedly 'incomprehensible' music.⁶ In this way, the press projected an image of a progressive Italian opera that raised a provocative question: if Italians, who were regarded as culturally closer to Mexicans, had already embraced musical modernity, why had Mexicans not done the same?

In 1885, Mexican newspapers announced Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* as a novel work belonging to the so-called modern Italian school. The company premiered the opera at the National Theatre in Mexico City on 14 October, and columnists such as Fanny Natali, known as Titania,⁷ described it as 'a masterpiece which, while not reaching the level of Verdi's latest compositions, is one of the finest *spartiti* of the modern Italian school.'⁸ Such comparisons to Verdi—who had not premiered a new opera since *Aida* (1871)—fuelled public speculation over who might inherit his musical legacy. However, not all critics embraced *Gioconda*'s modern credentials. A contributor to *El nacional* questioned the originality of *La Gioconda*, describing it as exaggerated and excessive, and accusing Arrigo Boito of crafting a pastiche lacking dramatic unity, filled with allusions to Schiller, Byron, Victor Hugo, and Somma. From this perspective, the work did not merit the label 'modern' that was so enthusiastically applied to it.⁹ After all, it had premiered in Milan in 1876—nine years before its Mexican debut. The criticism echoed a deeper concern that would later emerge in Campa's writings: the lack of truly current operatic repertoire in Mexico and the need to re-evaluate what counted as 'modern' music.

Progressive figures criticised the scarcity of truly up-to-date operatic productions in Mexico. For Campa, the so-called 'Modern school' referred to a universal compositional system derived from Wagner's theories, which broke with what he regarded as the outdated principles

⁶ The aspirations of the Mexican musical elite consisted of making Mexico the Italy of the Americas (discussed in Chapter One). By the end of the 19th century, this idea seemed outdated, possibly influenced by the political situation in Italy.

⁷ For Further information on Titania's background, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

⁸ 'es una obra maestra que sin llegar a la altura de las últimas composiciones de Verdi, es uno de los mejores *spartiti* de la escuela moderna italiana.' Titania [Fanny Natali], 'Ecos dominicales,' *La patria ilustrada*, no. 42 (19 October 1885): 659–66.

⁹ 'Gioconda,' *El nacional*, 20 September 1885, 2.

of the traditional Italian school—Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and the young Verdi. The Mexican press sometimes echoed this discourse, though the term ‘modern Italian school’ appeared more frequently among generalist columnists than the more doctrinaire Modern school. Campa, however, was sceptical of *La Gioconda*’s place in this lineage, arguing that it aligned more closely with the conventions of the past than with the spirit of modernity.¹⁰ In his analysis, he championed other figures—Arrigo Boito, ‘author of *Mefistofele*, erudite in art and notable poet’; Giovanni Sgambati, ‘a romantic composer strongly influenced by Wagnerian theories’; and Gaetano Coronaro—as more legitimate successors to Verdi.¹¹ At least two of these composers, though not explicitly noted by Campa, had direct links to Wagner himself.

Unlike *La Gioconda*, which reached Mexico nearly a decade after its Milanese premiere, Verdi’s *Otello* was staged at the National Theatre in the same year as its debut at La Scala (1887). This synchronicity positioned the Mexican operatic scene—at least chronologically—in step with the most current European developments. Expectations had already been building earlier that year, Campa had published a detailed analysis of the score in *La juventud literaria* and organised a concert at the Instituto Musical Campa-Hernández Acevedo, featuring excerpts such as the ‘Willow Song,’ the ‘Ave Maria,’ and the first-act duet (see Chapter Two). These efforts aimed to prepare the public for what he saw as a paradigmatic work of musical modernity. *Otello* premiered on 12 November 1887 in a season dominated by older bel canto works such as *Linda di Chamounix*, *Poliuto*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *Ernani*, and *La Sonnambula* further underscored its status as a modern opera.¹² Verdi, though widely admired, now presented a composition that departed radically from the melodic and structural conventions familiar to local audiences.

Critics remarked on this divergence. Aramís, writing in *El nacional*, observed that *Otello* required no elaborate scenery, opened without an overture, and gave no prominence to

¹⁰ Campa’s remark calls to mind that of the musicologist John Rosselli, who likened *La Gioconda* to a department store on account of its offering: ‘something for everybody—and plenty of it, in repeatable patterns: lots of villainy, romantic effusion, extras amid spectacular scenery and melodies (apt, however, to become invertebrate after a few bars).’ John Rosselli, ‘Italy: the decline of a tradition,’ in *The Late Romantic Era: From the Mid-19th Century to World War I*, ed. Jim Samson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 133.

¹¹ ‘[Boito], autor de *Mefistofele*, erudito en el arte y notable poeta; [Sgambati], compositor romántico fuertemente influenciado de las teorías wagneristas’ Gustavo E. Campa, ‘La Gioconda. Ópera de Almicar Ponchielli (Páginas de crítica musical),’ *El diario del hogar*, 6 de marzo de 1886, 2. This article was first published in the newspaper *La patria* in 1885 with several typographical errors.

¹² In association with Isidoro Pastor’s zarzuela company, the Italian opera company gave the unofficial première of Verdi’s *Otello* at the Teatro Nacional on 17 November 1887. For more information, see: Fernanda Muñoz Salazar, ‘El polémico estreno del “*Otello*” de Verdi a finales del siglo XIX en México,’ in *De Nueva España a México: el universo musical mexicano entre centenarios (1517–1917)*, ed. Javier Marín-López (Sevilla: Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, 2020), 325–339.

individual singers.¹³ Mignon, another commentator for the same paper, warned readers not to expect a lyrical melodrama ‘full of tender *fioriture*, tearful melodies, or affected arias and *duettinos*—no!’¹⁴ She stressed the opera’s break with tradition, describing it as a *création sui generis* that defied the ‘pretentious doctrines,’ while simultaneously praising its originality of style, structure, and harmonic development.¹⁵ For some, however, the work was too far ahead of its time: one musician confessed that the orchestra had struggled to rehearse it, declaring, ‘There is not a single intelligible phrase. This *Otello* is too much music for us. We are not yet educated enough to savour swallow’s nest soup, nor to understand music like *Otello* or *The Ring of the Nibelung*.’¹⁶ Critics interpreted Verdi’s return as a justification for the idea of musical progress aligned with Wagnerian principles. From this perspective, Wagner’s theories represented an inevitable path forward—one that Mexicans could no longer afford to ignore.

Public debates about musical progress quieted following the departure of the Italian opera company in December 1887. Campa, who had written about the premiere of Verdi’s *Otello* in *El siglo diez y nueve*, would not publish again until June 1888. It is possible that he believed his efforts to educate the public through music criticism had yielded little effect. Despite his attempts to prepare audiences for *Otello*’s musical demands, most critics responded with vague commentaries, focusing more on the libretto than on the score’s structural and harmonic innovations. His analysis—originally published in *La juventud literaria* and later reprinted as a pamphlet, as Mignon reported—was a serious attempt to reframe the reception of *Otello* through the lens of musical modernity. At the same time, the Instituto Musical Campa-Hernández Acevedo—founded in late 1886 to offer a progressive musical education—was forced to close during the summer of 1888. This series of setbacks left Campa deeply frustrated, a sentiment he would later share in correspondence with the Spanish critic Felipe Pedrell (discussed in Chapter Three). He wrote that he had lost all hope of witnessing the musical progress he had envisioned—until he discovered *La ilustración musical hispano-americana*, the journal edited by Pedrell in Barcelona. This renewed Campa’s sense of purpose, prompting him to denounce Mexico’s musical backwardness in his most confrontational text to date: ‘La música en México’.

¹³ Aramís, ‘Teatros. Compañía de ópera del Teatro Nacional. El Otello de Verdi,’ *El nacional*, 28 October 1887, 2.

¹⁴ ‘Llenos de ternuras *fiorituras*, de melodías llorosas, o de arias y *duettinos* amanerados, no!’ Mignon, ‘Paréntesis de la política. Ecos semanales,’ *El nacional*, 13 November 1887, 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

¹⁶ ‘según la expresión de uno de ellos, *no hay una sola frase inteligible*. Ese *Otello* es mucha música para nosotros. No estamos todavía suficientemente educados para comer sopa de nidos de golondrina, ni comprender músicas como el *Otello* o *El Anillo de los Nibelungen* [sic].’ ‘La ópera italiana,’ *El nacional*, 6 November 1887, 3. The reference to ‘swallow’s nest soup’ (*sopa de nidos de golondrina*) serves as a culinary metaphor for complex music perceived as inaccessible or ‘too cultivated’ for unprepared audiences.

First published in *El nacional*, 'La música en México' brings together the concerns Campa had voiced in earlier critiques, in which he was persuaded that he was serving his country. The young musician explicitly identified structural problems in the Mexican musical environment, particularly the outdated nature of local taste, reflected in the enduring attachment to *bel canto*. Campa called for an aesthetic reform to modernise national musical culture and analysed several interrelated areas in need of transformation. He renewed earlier criticisms, attributing the country's backwardness to the absence of a society of popular concerts such as those established by Jules Pasdeloup in France (first raised in the daily newspaper *La patria* in 1884); to the lack of musical criticism written by musicians rather than literary figures; and to the absence of an educated public, as he had argued in his 1886 biographical review of *L'œuvre dramatique de Richard Wagner* by Albert Soubies and Malherbe, published in *El diario del hogar*.¹⁷

In 'La música en México,' Campa placed particular blame on national music teachers and composers, whom he regarded as mostly responsible for musical stagnation. Campa criticised music teachers for perpetuating outdated knowledge rooted in the first half of the nineteenth century, and this observation resonated with Pedrell, who reprinted passages from Campa's article alongside ironic commentary to highlight its relevance to the Spanish context, where *bel canto* still held sway. In response, the music teacher Ildefonso de Olano questioned Campa's views. Campa had publicly identified several figures labelled as 'obstacles to progress' in the press—most notably, professors at the National Conservatoire such as its director Alfredo Bablot and Melesio Morales, Campa's former composition teacher.

Stage music composers constituted the second group targeted by Campa's criticism. Identified as *compositores lírico-dramáticos* in Spanish, these were musicians who wrote operas in the Italian style. While Campa acknowledged that many aspired to create serious, high-quality works, he believed they were fundamentally constrained by the limitations of the Italian school. Their efforts, he argued, remained inadequate because they merely reproduced the *defectos inherentes*—the inherent flaws—of an outdated system.¹⁸ His critique of Mexican composers who continued to emulate the *bel canto* tradition, however, should not be read as an early call for nationalist opera in the sense later embraced by postrevolutionary cultural ideologues. Rather, Campa's dissatisfaction stemmed from the belief that such operas perpetuated aesthetic dependency and formal stagnation, impeding the 'evolution' of musical taste.

¹⁷ Gustavo E. Campa, 'Bibliografía musical: *L'œuvre dramatique de Richard Wagner*,' *El diario del hogar*, 7 April 1886, 2.

¹⁸ Gustavo E. Campa, 'La música en México,' *El nacional*, 8 July 1888, 2.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Mexican composers wrote serious operas almost exclusively in Italian idiom, drawing on imported libretti and foreign dramaturgical models. As Áurea Maya has documented, most operas composed between 1859 and 1906 were set to European plots and adhered stylistically to the legacy of composers such as Donizetti and Bellini. The first Mexican opera, *Catalina de Guisa* (1859) by Cenobio Paniagua, was reportedly based on a libretto by Felice Romani—though the precise source remains uncertain—and recounted the conflict between Huguenots and Calvinists in sixteenth-century France. While works such as *Guatimotzin* (1870) by Aniceto Ortega introduced musical national themes, these remained the exception rather than the rule. At the turn of the twentieth century, Ricardo Castro staged *Atzimba* (1901) and Campa *Le roi poète* (1901), both based on pre-Columbian subjects, and Morales presented *Anita* (1903), which commemorated the victory at the Battle of Puebla during the French Intervention—yet was sung in Italian.¹⁹ Despite these attempts at thematic nationalisation, the Italian style remained dominant, and the resulting operas by Mexican composers were often marginalised, dismissed as derivative rather than recognised as innovative.

This reliance on the Italian model was symptomatic of broader structural limitations, including the absence of systematic musical training and institutional support.²⁰ This diagnosis intersects with Campa's own critique, which framed the persistence of Italian operatic conventions as a failure to embrace modernisation. However, musicological discourse has since moved beyond simplistic national classifications—Italian, German, French, and 'nationalist'—to explore how musical expression articulates ideology, even within supposedly 'universal' traditions.²¹ In this respect, Campa's position should be interpreted in the context of what Nicholas Till describes as a shift in operatic history tied to geopolitical transformations. He

¹⁹ Áurea Maya identifies twenty-five operatic works composed between 1859 and 1906. Among those working within the Italian tradition was Melesio Morales, who set to music a number of printed libretti: *Romeo* (1863), with a text by Felice Romani; *Ildegonda* (1866) and *Gino Corsini* (1877), both with libretti by Temistocle Solera; as well as *Cleopatra* (1891) and *Anita* (1903). Notably, no Mexican operas were staged during the 1880s. Although Maya does not offer a detailed explanation for this hiatus, she suggests that in earlier decades, Mexican composers had suffered from a lack of institutional support and had depended on touring companies to stage their works. For impresarios, however, it was more profitable to mount established foreign works—particularly those by Verdi—than to invest in local productions. The most favourable context for the performance of Mexican operas, according to Maya, occurred during the reign of Maximilian (1864–1867). Other composers never saw their operas staged at all. In Campa's case, he worked on an opera titled *Maria Tudor*, excerpts of which were performed in concert by the soprano Rosa Palacios in 1885 (as discussed in Chapter Two). The opera, however, remained unfinished. Áurea Maya, 'La herencia cultural,' in *La música en los siglos XIX y XX*, eds. Ricardo Miranda and Aurelio Tello (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2013), 81–111. For Cenobio Paniagua's *Catalina de Guisa*, see: *ibid.*, 86–87.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

²¹ Suzanne Aspden, 'Opera and national identity,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, ed. Nicholas Till (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 277.

identifies three key categories: an early period in which Italian opera—understood as a formal-linguistic rather than strictly national category—dominated European stages; a nineteenth-century phase marked by the emergence of indigenous operatic schools linked to the rise of nation-states; and finally, a twentieth-century phase characterised by the ‘Europeanisation’ of opera, as works circulated freely across borders and contributed to a shared international repertory shaped by increasingly homogenised cultural values.²² By the late nineteenth century, the Mexican operatic landscape did not align neatly with Till’s periodisation: rather than progressing sequentially through these categories, it reflected a hybrid condition in which the formal conventions of Italian opera (category one) continued to dominate, even as composers increasingly aspired to participate in the transnational circulation and cultural modernity associated with category three. These aspirations, however, were pursued from what was considered as a peripheral position, shaped by structural constraints and aesthetic dependencies.

Campa pointed to a lack of progress attributed to Italian composers. Throughout his criticism, he employed a particular vocabulary that today may seem outdated but proves useful for tracing intellectual connections. First, Campa criticised composers’ loyalty to a ‘decadent’ tradition. There is a passage in ‘La música en México’ that summarises the principal tendencies of the Italian school according to Campa:

Dramatic authors who admit no other forms than the worn-out ones; who take on the thankless task of sacrificing dramatic truth and synthetic expression for the sake of trivial and vulgar formulas; who still, with the greatest delight, draw out bravura arias overloaded with *fiorituras*, hold notes and fermatas, exasperating cabalettas, duets in parallel thirds from beginning to end, insipid and colourless recitatives, violin, flute or clarinet solos with no dramatic purpose, and *ritornellos* as useless as they are unjustified.²³

Although Campa does not specify the direct sources of these criticisms in ‘La música en México,’ it is only later—particularly in his responses to Fanny Natali (alias Titania), the critic, soprano, and close ally in the campaigns against the Conservatoire²⁴—that he explicitly engages with the Spanish critic Joaquín Marsillach and other French Wagnerian influences. This later

²² Nicholas Till, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, ed. Nicholas Till (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 16–17.

²³ ‘Compositores siempre fieles á la consigna aludida, invariable en sus principios, esclavos de sus ideas, intransigentes con lo que á ellas se opone en lo más mínimo; autores dramáticos que no admiten más formas que las gastadas, que se imponen la ingrata tarea de sacrificar la verdad escénica y expresión sintética en aras de las fórmula triviales y vulgares, que trazan aún con la mayor delectación arias de *bravura* recargadas de *fiorituri*, calderones y *fermattas*, *cabalettas* desesperantes, duos en terceras de principio á fin, recitados insípidos é incoloros, *solos* de violín, flauta ó clarinete sin oportunidades y *ritornellos* tan inútiles como injustificados.’ Gustavo E. Campa, ‘La música en México,’ *El nacional*, 8 July 1888, 2.

²⁴ On Natali’s intellectual and artistic role, see: Chapter 2.

discourse provides essential context that deepens our understanding of Campa's reformist position.

Second, Campa identified what he considered an excessive reliance on melody among Mexican composers. Rather than treating it as one element among many, he claimed that they elevated melody as the ultimate bearer of beauty in a musical work. For Campa, this approach relied on 'banal phrases and formulas' that could be 'easily recognised and understood—just as Schumann observed in reference to Italian music.'²⁵ As a result, any melodic line lacking these features was readily dismissed—quite possibly a criticism Campa himself had received. He also condemned the pursuit of 'immediate physical pleasure' through melody, echoing concerns voiced by Camille Saint-Saëns in his 1879 essay 'Harmonie et mélodie'.

Campa's references reveal an ambiguous and eclectic critical position, drawing on multiple sources that were not always coherently integrated. It is unlikely that he read Schumann directly, and his polemics often relied on vague, repetitive formulations. Nonetheless, the extended quotations cited earlier suggest that he sought to construct a reformist aesthetic by weaving together various strands of European criticism—particularly those associated with French Wagnerism, as mediated through writers such as Marsillach and Saint-Saëns.

For Campa, the real culprits were not the audiences but the composers themselves—especially the lyric-dramatic ones—who dismissed Wagnerian ideas and continued to write music based on what he considered an outdated model. Campa considered the supremacy of harmony over melody to be essential, focusing on the passage he quoted from *Harmonie et mélodie*. By drawing on this source, Campa linked musical technique to a broader civilisational hierarchy. He implied that the development of musical elements paralleled the development of societies: rhythm belonged to a primitive stage, melody to infancy, and harmony—particularly in its German form—to full maturity. Harmony thus became not only a musical ideal but also a marker of civilisational progress, one that justified Mexico's participation in the Western civilising project.

Campa cited Saint-Saëns to criticise those composers who pursued 'melody for melody's sake.' Saint-Saëns, in turn, took issue with what he described as the doctrines of 'the followers of Stendhal'—critics and composers who placed excessive emphasis on melody, considered any phrase that the ear could not immediately recognise as anti-melodic, and

²⁵ 'juzgan anti-melódica toda música que carece de las frases y fórmulas banales que se comprenden y reconocen sin esfuerzo, como dice Schumann refiriéndose á la música italiana'. Gustavo E. Campa, 'La música en México,' *El nacional*, 8 July 1888, 2.

believed that melody ought to produce ‘physical pleasure.’ Campa referred to the second section of *Harmonie et mélodie*, first published in 1879 and reissued in the 1885 collection of the same name.²⁶ By quoting Saint-Saëns, Campa lent authority to the notion that the melodic school had fallen into disuse; that aesthetic judgement was superior because it transcended both sensation and rationality; that composers ought to aspire to the sublime—a beauty which combined noble melodies with harmonic development; and, most crucially, that those who rejected harmony ultimately impeded the progress of civilisation.²⁷ This final assertion is particularly significant, as it marks the first time Campa explicitly associates harmonic writing with the advance of civilisation.

The central argument of Saint-Saëns’s article is a defence of music against those who impoverish it by claiming that only the music of the past holds any value. He criticises literary writers for composing music criticism without proper musical training, and for reducing music to melody alone. To prepare the ground for this argument, Saint-Saëns opens the first part of the article by dismantling the outdated theory that separated music into two distinct categories—melodic and harmonic—and privileged the former. Here he references Stendhal as an example of those who spread misleading ideas about the nature and function of melody. In the second part, Saint-Saëns turns his attention to critics and audiences who seek physical gratification in melody and who attempt to sever it from harmony. For Saint-Saëns, such views are untenable: to enjoy melody alone is to remain in the infancy of civilisation. Harmony, by contrast, is the product of cultural evolution. What truly matters is aesthetic pleasure—the combination of both elements—not mere physical delight.²⁸

The critique of physical pleasure deserves careful consideration. Nineteenth-century Mexican intellectuals typically viewed themselves as members of what was then referred to as the *Latin race*, and thus naturally inclined toward melodic, joyful music—music written ‘for the heart’ rather than the intellect.²⁹ A passage from Luis Muñoz Ledo’s *Estudios históricos* (1866) defended the role of historical thinking in shaping Mexican society.³⁰ According to Muñoz Ledo, Mexico formed part of a universal history and had not yet reached maturity; its task, still

²⁶ Camille Saint-Saëns, *Harmonie et mélodie* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885).

²⁷ Campa does not explicitly articulate this teleological model of musical development. However, his citation of Saint-Saëns’s *Harmonie et mélodie*—a text that constructs precisely such a hierarchy—suggests that he subscribed to its underlying logic. His alignment with the German harmonic tradition and his repeated criticisms of melody as regressive further support this inference.

²⁸ Saint-Saëns, *Harmonie et mélodie*, 16–17.

²⁹ The term ‘Latin race’ was commonly used in the nineteenth century to describe nations of Southern European and Latin American heritage, often with cultural rather than biological connotations. Its use here reflects historical self-perceptions rather than contemporary understandings of race.

³⁰ Luis F. Muñoz Ledo, *Estudios históricos sobre la música* (México: Imprenta de A. Boix, a cargo de M. Zornoza, 1886).

unfulfilled, was to progress in order to take its rightful place among the civilised nations. At that time, however, the notion of national ‘backwardness’ was not yet linked to a preference for melody over harmony. By Campa’s time, such a view had shifted. Progress now followed a singular path, defined by the ideals of Wagnerism. From Campa’s perspective, clinging to the Italian—or so-called ‘melodic’—school was tantamount to desiring to remain in a state of aesthetic childhood. Campa’s accusation is better understood when it is connected to the Spanish critic Joaquín Marsillach’s writings. This was more in tune with the notion of a ‘decadent’ school in the way Mexicans interpreted it.

The ‘Midday Wagnerians’: Marsillach and Boito as Latin Defenders of Wagnerism.

In July 1888, some days after the publication of ‘La música en México,’ some critics replied to defend the Italian school which they considered to be ‘universal’ and ‘laudable’. Campa only replied to his friend Natali from *El nacional*, arguing that she was the only critic with sufficient knowledge on the subject.³¹ The rest he dismissed as ignorant and unworthy of serious engagement. Campa assured Natali that his criticism was not directed at *bel canto* singers—despite having previously done so—but at composers, since, for Campa, it was composition—not performance—that held the transformative power to reshape musical taste.

To show that his comments had scholarly support, Campa referenced mostly French names like Jacques Hermann and Octave Fouque, whose writings denounced the stagnation of traditional operatic forms and praised the dramatic innovations introduced by Wagner. Quoting Fouque, Campa echoed the idea that ‘a great example has been given: everywhere, art is renewing itself; and even in Italy, that land of precise melody and excessive vocalisation, Wagner’s austerity has found followers and imitators.’ By citing these authorities, Campa sought to demonstrate that his position was not merely personal or polemical, but grounded in a broader European discourse that viewed the Wagnerian model as a necessary evolution of musical drama. In this view, clinging to the Italian tradition was not just a matter of taste, but a refusal to adapt to a modern, intellectually superior aesthetic that had already taken root across the civilised world.³²

³¹ The other critics who responded to Campa’s attacks against the Italian school were Héctor from *La patria* and E. F., a reader of *El nacional*. See: Titania [Fanny Natali], ‘Cartas de la semana,’ *El nacional*, 1 July 1888, 1–2; Héctor, ‘Diversiones del domingo,’ *La patria*, 3 July 1888, 2–3; E. F., ‘Una cuestión musical,’ *El nacional*, 24 July 1888, 2. The identities of both writers are enigmatic. The pseudonym of Héctor coincides with that of writers José Ricardo del Castillo and Agapito Silva.

³² For Campa’s use of Fouque: ‘Un gran ejemplo se ha dado –dice Octavio Fouquet– en todas partes el arte se renueva, y hasta en Italia, en ese país de la melodía precisa, de la vocalización a todo trance, las severidades de Wagner han encontrado adeptos e imitadores.’ Gustavo E. Campa, ‘Una cuestión musical,’ *El nacional*, 18 July 1888, 2. ‘Un grand exemple se donne: de tous côtés l’art se renouvelle, et jusqu’en Italie, dans ce pays de la mélodie précise, de la vocalisation à outrance, les sévérités de Wagner

But it was the extensive quote from Joaquín Marsillach, a Barcelona-based Wagnerian critic, that stands out. In the past, Campa had only quoted Antonio Peña y Goñi—another Wagnerian Spanish critic—to comment on Verdi’s *Aida*. Peña y Goñi was part of a broader Wagnerian discourse in Spain that often looked to France for critical models, yet his polemical style and rhetorical excesses tended to reduce Wagnerism to a polarising label.³³ In contrast, quoting Marsillach—whose book offered a more structured, transnational interpretation—allowed Campa to approach Wagnerism as a serious aesthetic alternative that was gaining intellectual ground in Spain and Italy. Quoting a transnational Wagnerian network legitimised Campa’s reformist agenda, much like Campa’s earlier engagement with *L’œuvre dramatique de Richard Wagner* by Albert Soubies and Charles Malherbe in 1886.

In 1878, Marsillach published *Ricardo Wagner: ensayo biográfico crítico*, the first biography of Wagner ever written in Spain. The book was both a historical explanation of the origins and evolution of stage music and a defence of Wagner’s legacy. Organised into five chapters, it begins with a biographical sketch, followed by a discussion of the musical poem and a detailed reflection on the development of opera—the latter being the section most extensively quoted by Campa. The final chapters focus on the Bayreuth Festival and Marsillach’s vision for the future of music. From the outset, Marsillach made clear that his aim was ‘to present plainly the theories of the bold reformer, to gather the various materials scattered here and there on the so-called Music of the Future, so that Wagner might cease to

ont trouvé des adeptes et des imitateurs.’ Octave Fouque, *Les révolutionnaires de la musique* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1882), 312. For Hermann’s quote: ‘El antiguo arte italiano... se evaporase repentinamente ante la aparición de la obra de Meyerbeer como se funde la nieve a los rayos del sol... se puede afirmar que el antiguo arte italiano murió de muerte natural como esas mariposas que desaparecen al cambio de estación.’ Ibid. ‘C’est un fait excessivement remarquable que l’ancien art italien des Piccini, des Rossini et des Bellini s’évanouit tout à coup devant l’apparition de l’œuvre de Meyerbeer, comme la neige fond aux rayons du soleil; c’est un fait plus remarquable encore, que cette disparition subite ne fut pas le résultat d’un changement dans le goût du public, qui continua à acclamer, pendant de longues années, les chefs-d’œuvre de ces maîtres. On peut donc affirmer que l’ancien art italien mourut de sa mort naturelle, comme ces papillons qu’un changement de saison fait disparaître.’ Jacques Hermann, *Le drame lyrique en France depuis Gluck jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1878), 73.

³³ According to Juan José Carreras, Wagner’s reception in Madrid during the 1870s was marked by a lack of ambition. On one hand, Francisco Asenjo Barbieri had published *Cartas musicales* in 1874, which showed clear disinterest in Wagner’s music. On the other hand, the disputes between Barbieri and Antonio Peña y Goñi often revolved around the terms ‘Wagnerian’ and ‘anti-Wagnerian,’ which, Carreras argues, represented ‘a worrying symptom of a critical culture and musicians who preferred to retreat into clichéd mockery rather than engage seriously with Wagnerian proposals.’ A significant shift in the Spanish discourse around Wagner’s works occurred following two *Cartas musicales* published in 1873 by José Castro y Serrano. This critic denounced the lack of ambition in the musical press and argued that Wagner’s works should be made accessible to the Madrid public. It was within this context that Marsillach’s book appeared. Juan José Carreras, ‘Wagnerismos,’ en Juan José Carreras, Teresa Cascudo, Celsa Alonso, y Cristina Bordas, ‘La consolidación de una cultura musical (1860–1890),’ in *Historia de la música en España e Hispanoamérica: La música en España en el siglo XIX*, ed. Juan José Carreras (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2018), 555–556.

be, in Spain, the bogeyman of musicians.³⁴ One of the book's key contributions was thus its transnational scope: Marsillach gathered sources and testimonies from various countries in an attempt to reframe Wagner's image in Spain, where he had long been regarded as an object of fear and ridicule.

The book opens with a letter to Marsillach from Wagner himself. In it, Wagner encourages foreign musicians to study the development of German art in poetry and music, suggesting that the very attention of outsiders confirms the originality and enduring character of the German style:

If it is confirmed that the development of German art in the spheres of Poetry and Music *draws attention and fosters hope among foreign nations*, we must agree that the originality and unchanging character of this development is what *truly inspires their interest*. Therefore, it would be untimely for us to seek any further provocation. From this point of view, I believe that our neighbours, and Germans themselves, should endeavour to understand the truly German style, which we have faithfully perfected.³⁵

Wagner's words are revealing not only for what they say, but for whom they address. Implicitly, he contrasts the enthusiasm of 'foreign nations' with the indifference of his own contemporaries—both in France and in Germany—thus framing foreign admiration as a kind of ethical recognition. In this light, Marsillach and Campa emerge not merely as readers or translators, but as participants in the validation of German musical modernity. By quoting this passage at the very beginning of his book, Marsillach positions himself as one of the attentive 'outsiders' Wagner invokes: someone capable of recognising the transcendent value of a national art that aspires to universal significance. Campa's engagement with Wagnerism reflects a similar dynamic: he, too, saw in the so-called German style a vehicle for artistic regeneration. Rather than treating German music as something foreign or alienating, both Marsillach and Campa embraced its aesthetic principles as a cosmopolitan ideal. Their reception of Wagnerism thus operated through the paradox that an art defined by its national rootedness could nonetheless serve as a model for global modernity.

³⁴ 'era exponer sencillamente las teorías del audaz reformador, reunir los distintos materiales que acá y allá andan dispersos sobre la mal llamada Música del porvenir, a fin de que Wagner deje de ser en España el bú de los músicos'. Joaquín Marsillach, *Ricardo Wagner: ensayo biográfico-crítico, con un prólogo epistolar de José de Letamendi, en donde se legitima por la filosofía del arte teatral la aparición del gran reformador* (Barcelona: Texidó y Parera, 1878), viii.

³⁵ 'Si se confirma que el desarrollo del arte alemán en la esfera de la Poesía y de la Música llama la atención y fomenta esperanzas en las naciones extranjeras, hemos de convenir en que la originalidad y el carácter invariable que ofrece este desarrollo es lo que principalmente mueve su interés; siendo por lo tanto inoportuno cualquiera otra excitación de nuestra parte. Bajo este punto de vista creo que nuestros vecinos y los alemanes también podrían procurar conocer el estilo verdaderamente alemán, que hemos perfeccionado fielmente.' Autograph dedicated to Marsillach. See: *Ibid.*, n/p. *Cursives are mine.* A reproduction of the original can be found in the appendix on pages 142 and 143.

Building on this gesture, Marsillach's *Ricardo Wagner* offered Spanish readers an informed and structured interpretation of Wagner's *œuvre*, countering the fragmentary commentaries and journalistic polemics that dominated the reception of his music in Spain. His book departed from the usual anecdotal approach by tracing the historical development of opera, following Wagner's own model: first a dramaturgical analysis of the libretto, then a discussion of musical innovations. In this structure, Rossini functioned as a scapegoat representing a 'moribund school.'³⁶ The inclusion of extensive documentary appendices also underscored the transnational aspirations of Wagner's work, situating it within a broader European network of reception. These features place Marsillach's book firmly within the orbit of *wagnérisme*, particularly due to its positive references to Meyerbeer, Édouard Schuré, and Charles Beauquier—signals of a strong French influence that also shaped the broader Spanish Wagnerian discourse.³⁷

The polemic caused by Campa's 'La música en México' raised opposition. Critics opposing Campa defended the Italian school, arguing for its universal value and its enduring capacity to produce great singers. In contrast, Campa was not the only one who regarded the Italian school as a symbol of artistic stagnation. Aurelio G. Garay, writing under the pseudonym *Boccacio*, supported Campa's critique by asserting that the Italian school had fallen into disuse—even in its country of origin. Referring to Italy as 'the birthplace land of melody,' Garay claimed that the operatic tradition of Bellini, Paisiello, and Cimarosa no longer held the same prestige among Italian musicians themselves. Drawing from the *Revista Melodramática* of Milan, Garay presented this as incontrovertible evidence that Wagner had 'entered Italy with flag unfurled,' prompting even Italians to distance themselves from the old school.³⁸ By citing an Italian source, Garay positioned Campa's critique not as an isolated or anti-Italian sentiment, but as a reflection of broader shifts taking place within Italy itself.

Among pro-Wagnerian critics (whether Mexican, Spanish, or French), there was a shared belief that Wagner's work needed to be explained to the public in order to take root. A letter from Marsillach to Boito, published in the press, exemplifies this idea.³⁹ In 1880, the Madrid-based illustrated weekly magazine *Día de Moda* published a letter from Joaquín Marsillach written to

³⁶ Carreras, 'Wagnerismos,' 557–558.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Boccacio [Aurelio G. Garay], 'El domingo,' *El diario del hogar*, 29 July 1888, 1. Interestingly, the *Revista Melodramática* cited by Garay has not been located. Whether this reference was imprecise, rhetorical, or based on an ephemeral publication now lost to the archive, it nonetheless reveals a broader pattern in Campa's circle: the invocation of European periodicals served not only to inform, but to legitimise. In a context where Mexican critics struggled for recognition, the mere mention of foreign authority—whether verified or not—carried persuasive weight.

³⁹ Joaquín Marsillach, 'Ricardo Wagner y el espíritu italiano,' *Día de moda* (Madrid), no. 19 (14 June 1880): 6.

the Italian poet and dramatist Arrigo Boito. In this, Marsillach requested Boito's support in writing an introduction for the Italian translation of his 1878 biography of Wagner.⁴⁰ Marsillach was fully aware that his critique of the Italian school would be met with disapproval. Marsillach feared that his severe criticism of Italian opera would lead the Italian public to reject his book altogether. He thus relied on a carefully chosen intermediary to soften potential negative hostilities. For Marsillach, Boito was the ideal candidate: '[...] you who have performed the miracle of being a Wagnerist without ceasing to be Italian, and who translates Wagner's poems as well as composes a libretto for Verdi'.⁴¹ Boito, for Marsillach, personified the synthesis of Wagnerian ideology and Italian national feeling.

In the letter, Marsillach defended his critique of bel canto opera through a rhetorical strategy of concession and praise. He recognised Italy's historical 'musical supremacy' during the first half of the nineteenth century, as well as the refined artistic sensibility of its people. Nonetheless, Marsillach agreed with others on the fact that an Italian school's 'general error' had led to its decline of the Italian school. This error, he explained, lay not in the individual contributions of composers like Rossini, Bellini, or Verdi—whom he praised for their intellectual, emotional, and sensual expressiveness—but in the underlying conception of melodrama itself. For Marsillach, the Italian model suffered from a fundamental misunderstanding of dramatic structure, which Wagner's theories sought to correct. Therefore, Italians' contemporary 'crucial' role was to make Wagner's system 'finally effective' by acting as a cultural mediator between North and South. For Marsillach, the role of Italians was to prepare the reception of Wagner's music for the 'pueblos del mediodía'—the people of the South.⁴² Countering a common prejudice, Marsillach insisted that the obstacle was not the 'poor preparation of the southern audiences,' Marsillach wrote, but rather their 'distinct artistic idiosyncrasies'. Italian youth, he believed, had the task of grasping the ideals of Wagner's genius and giving them 'practical expression' in the South— '[adapting] the idea to the conditions of receptivity over time' as he put it, in view of the differences between Latin and Anglo-Saxon audiences. At the age of twenty-one, Marsillach declared his solidarity with Italy's artistic youth and presented himself to Boito as a fellow mediator, saying he be satisfied if he could help 'guide onto the right path' every Italian still hostile to Wagner.

⁴⁰ Regarding the relationship between Marsillach and Boito, Marsillach wrote the essay *Arrigo Boito y son Mefistofele* in Catalan in 1880. It was later translated into Spanish as *Arrigo Boito y su Mefistófeles* in 1883.

⁴¹ 'usted que ha realizado el milagro de ser wagnerista sin dejar de ser italiano, y que así traduce los poemas de Wagner como compone un libreto para Verdi'. Joaquín Marsillach, 'Ricardo Wagner y el espíritu italiano,' *Día de moda* (Madrid), no. 19 (14 June 1880): 6.

⁴² Although Marsillach does not use the term explicitly, his vision aligns with wider nineteenth-century debates on cultural hierarchies between North and South in Europe.

Boito was regarded as a southern ambassador of Wagnerism. His opera *Mefistofele* was performed in Mexico City on 14 November 1888.⁴³ That same morning, an unidentified columnist from *El tiempo* prepared the public for an unfamiliar experience. While the theme—Goethe’s *Faust*—was well known, the journalist insisted the music was ‘entirely modern’ and, like *Otello*, unlikely to be immediately pleasing to Mexican audiences. Still, he urged readers not to shy away. One needed to hear the work several times ‘to form a perfect judgement and acquire a taste for it.’ Despite its challenges, the opera offered ‘new motives’ and ‘admirably effective melodic passages.’ In the end, he described *Mefistofele* as ‘Goethe’s *Faust* wrapped in rather extravagant fantasies and set to music in the Wagnerian style.’⁴⁴

After the premiere of *Mefistofele*, *El siglo diez y nueve* echoed the same tension between tradition and innovation, but with greater emphasis on the opera’s bold synthesis. The anonymous critic confessed to feeling ‘overwhelmed under the weight of the eminently Wagnerian music of *Mefistofele*,’ which clashed with local expectations shaped by ‘purely melodic works of the Italian school.’ Yet Boito’s opera was more than a foreign import—it was, according to the reviewer, a vital bridge between the Latin soul and German construction. Germany’s scientific and philosophical advances had, in this reading, transformed Italian melodrama into a more architectonic and expressive art form.⁴⁵ In a commentary on the evolving relationship between poetry and music, the same critic acknowledged that the modern lyric drama had separated poetry from vocal music. Yet, he argued, expressivity had not been lost. The best evidence for this was the way ‘those fragments of barbaric Latinity,’ stripped of the beauty of poetic language, had nonetheless become the vehicle for ‘the most expressive and sublime music.’ In conclusion, he celebrated *Mefistofele* as a worthy representative of a genre ‘much attacked and little known,’ but whose success that evening suggested that Mexico’s foremost theatre would no longer remain closed to Wagnerian works.⁴⁶

⁴³ Campa also wrote a detailed essay on *Mefistofele*, published in *La juventud literaria* shortly after the premiere in 1888. For reasons of space, it is not analysed here.

⁴⁴ ‘Habrá necesidad de oírla varias veces para formarse perfecto juicio y tomarle gusto. Sin embargo, en la primera audición se verá que abunda en motivos nuevos y buenos, y tiene trozos melódicos de efecto admirable. [...] En resumen, el *Mefistófeles* de Boito es una obra muy notable y puede concretarse el juicio sobre ella a decir que es el poema Fausto de Goëthe [sic] envuelto en fantasías no poco extravagantes y puesto en la música del género wagneriano.’ ‘Mefistófeles de Boito,’ *El tiempo*, 14 November 1888, 2.

⁴⁵ ‘La vida en México. *Mefistófeles*,’ *El siglo diez y nueve*, 17 November 1888, 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

French Wagnerism Reframed in Mexican Debates

As we saw, in ‘La música en México,’ Campa accused Mexican composers of neglecting the study of Wagner’s stage works. He believed that the country’s musical stagnation stemmed from composers’ failure to shape public taste. This failure, in turn, was the result of an open rejection of the Wagnerian system. Campa was perplexed by such antipathy towards the German composer, and he posed a series of rhetorical questions that shed light on his view of trends in the history of French music:

What was Wagner’s crime in expanding, in some way, Gluck’s theories and realising them in his own manner? What abominable act did he commit by proposing to continue the legacy of Gluck, as well as Beethoven and Weber? What audacity, to wish to bequeath his nation a distinctly national art! What venom lies in his works that inspires such revulsion, such antipathy, such hatred, in a word?... What offence did he hurl at us—as he did at France in 1870—to provoke such profound indignation among our fellow countrymen? Why such scorn for the artist and indifference to his colossal endeavour?... These and other questions we have often asked ourselves, without ever arriving at a satisfactory explanation.⁴⁷

The melodramatic tone Campa employs evokes the well-worn trope of the misunderstood genius. Most notably, his reference to France in 1870 may allude to Wagner’s *Eine Kapitulation* (1870), a satirical libretto mocking the French after their defeat in the Franco-Prussian War.⁴⁸ Whether or not Campa was familiar with this work, his invocation of 1870 imbues Wagner’s rejection with a quasi-political and historical dimension.

Afterwards, Campa explained that ‘everybody’ advised him to study the Wagnerian system in order to improve compositional skills and connect with that which ‘elevates the soul and expands the heart’—the aesthetic pleasure embodied by Saint-Saëns.⁴⁹ According to Campa, the fate of Mexican composers was to lose their originality. However, if they studied Wagner’s system, he claimed:

From that study would not arise imitation, as one might object, but rather intellectual robustness, imaginative power, vigour of ideas, and independence of inspiration, even if the latter proposition is considered doubtful. Catulle Mendès has stated in a writing

⁴⁷ ‘¿Cuál fué el crimen de Wagner al ampliar en cierto modo las teorías de Gluck y realizarlas á su manera? ¿Qué acción abominable cometió al proponerse ser su continuador, tanto como de Beethoven y Weber? ¿Qué audacia al querer legar á su país un arte nacional bien caracterizado? ¿Qué veneno ocultan sus obras que inspire tal repulsión, tal antipatía, tal odio, en una palabra?... ¿Qué injuria nos ha lanzado, como á la Francia en 1870, para provocar la honda indignación de nuestros compatriotas? ¿Por qué ese desprecio por el artista y desinterés por su colosal tentativa?... Esas y otras preguntas nos hemos dirigido á menudo sin alcanzar una explicación satisfactoria.’ Gustavo E. Campa, ‘La música en México,’ *El nacional*, 8 July 1888, 2.

⁴⁸ Wagner’s *Eine Kapitulation* (1870) was a politically charged satirical libretto written in response to France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. Although rarely performed, it became notorious for its scathing portrayal of French culture and politics.

⁴⁹ ‘eleva el alma y dilata el corazón,’ Gustavo E. Campa, ‘La música en México,’ *El nacional*, 8 July 1888, 2.

about the great musician: ‘The intimate knowledge of masterpieces favours, rather than hinders, the independence of inspiration.’⁵⁰

Campa reassured his colleagues that composers such as Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Chabrier, d’Indy, Boito, and Verdi studied Wagner’s music, finding in it both inspiration and freedom of expression. In doing so, Campa presented Wagnerism as a successful movement in France—a portrayal that was far from accurate.

The analysis reveals that Campa created a pastiche by merging various sources and ideas. In so doing, he constructed a narrative that, from the vantage point of a ‘peripheral’ country, reimagined past events in Europe to introduce them as contemporary. This reinterpretation can partly be explained by the specific sources Campa consulted. Although some of the French critics he quoted had contributed to the *Revue Wagnérienne*, there is no evidence that this journal circulated in Mexico. Rather than engaging directly with this Wagnerian network, Campa accessed their ideas indirectly—mainly through essay collections and anthologies published in Paris. The essay collection format typically involved an established critic selecting their writings to be published as ‘the best’ of their output. This was the case, for instance, with Paul Scudo’s *Critique et littérature musicales* (1850), a collection later reprinted in the French family magazine *Les Musées des Familles* (1852). Although Campa did not read Scudo directly, members of the Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana did, and republished his essays in the short-lived *La Armonía* (1866–67), where French criticism helped frame musical taste in Mexico.⁵¹ Campa would later emulate this model by publishing two volumes of his own music criticism, likewise selected to reflect his aesthetic and ideological positions.

This format results in a decontextualization of the original criticism. Articles were initially written for specific purposes and audiences, but when republished in collections, readers lacked the original context necessary to fully grasp their intended meaning. Adding to this, Campa recontextualised the selected passages for a Mexican audience, thereby imbuing the original texts with new significance. In Mexican cultural practice, such quotations were not subject to detailed explanation or discussion; rather, they functioned as self-standing assertions. The purpose of this practice was to lend authority to a claim by citing a European source. For example, Campa quoted a sentence from the article ‘Le jeune prix de Rome et le

⁵⁰ ‘De ese estudio no nacería la imitación, como se podría objetar, sino la robustez intelectual, la potencia imaginativa, el vigor de las ideas y la independencia de la inspiración, por más que se juzgue dudosa la última proposición. Catulle Mendès lo ha dicho en un escrito acerca del gran músico: ‘El íntimo conocimiento de las obras maestras favorece, en vez de perjudicar, la independencia de la inspiración.’ Ibid.

⁵¹ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of how Paul Scudo’s essays were adapted and republished in *La Armonía* (1866–1867) by the Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana

vieux wagnériste' by the Wagnerian Catulle Mendès, reproduced as an epilogue in his book *Richard Wagner* (1886).⁵² This case exemplifies how Campa selectively appropriated and transformed French Wagnerian criticism to serve his own aesthetic and cultural agenda, shaping a narrative that suited the Mexican context.

The article features a dialogue between two characters: the young laureate and the old Wagnerist. In the story, the young man expresses admiration for Wagner's works, which he studies in the conservatoire library. The old man replies, 'That's good. One must study the works of the masters. In my opinion, an intimate knowledge of masterpieces encourages, rather than hinders, independent inspiration. But you seem to be in a hurry to study. Don't you have, let's be honest, a less obvious goal?'⁵³

In Campa's context, the old man's encouragement is understood as urging the young composer to study Wagner's masterpieces. In contrast, Mendès' character approves of studying masterpieces but warns of the dangers inherent in Wagner's music: that young French composers risked imitating the musical characteristics associated with the German race—just as Mexicans did. Essentially, Mendès's article is a reflection on nationality and aesthetics rather than an outright endorsement for composers to seek their own compositional voice through Wagner's operas.

Mendès's article recommends studying Wagner's aesthetic theories rather than his operas themselves. These theories were seen as possessing a universal character that could be adapted to the French spirit.⁵⁴ Consequently, the old Wagnerist advises the *prix de Rome* to embrace his country's heritage by drawing on French legends and national songs. 'By doing so, you will be providing a truly national service, and the public will understand you,' the Wagnerist replies.⁵⁵ Moreover, Mendès and Campa held diametrically opposed views. Firstly, the old Wagnerist rejected the idea of a universal school. Unlike Mendès, Campa believed in a universal school that did not distinguish between nationalities. Secondly, Mendès opposed the Germanisation of French music—a position that contrasted with Campa's aesthetic agenda, which Morales would later critique, as will be discussed in the following section.

⁵² The article 'Le jeune prix de Rome et le vieux wagnériste' was first published in *Le Gaulois* in 1876. It was later reproduced by the *Revue Wagnérienne* in 1885 with the following subtitle 'entretien familier,' 394. See: François Leisire, 'Le jeune prix de Rome' de Catulle Mendès,' *Cahiers Debussy*, no. 6 (1982), 36–40, quoted in Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 78 n. 20.

⁵³ 'Voilà qui est bien. Il faut étudier les ouvrages des maîtres. A mon sens, la connaissance intime des chefs-d'œuvre favorise, au lieu de la gêner, l'indépendance d'inspiration. Mais vous semblez bien pressé d'étudier. N'auriez-vous pas, parlons franchement, quelque but moins avouable?' Catulle Mendès, *Richard Wagner* (Paris: G. Charpentier et Cie, 1886), 275–276.

⁵⁴ Huebner, *French Opera...*, 278, 280.

⁵⁵ 'En agissant de la sorte vous ferez œuvre véritablement nationale, et le public vous comprendra'. Mendès, *Richard Wagner*, 282.

Campa's allusion to the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) invites the question of whether he fully grasped the context of Mendès's book. The article 'Le jeune wagnériste'—included as the epilogue—can be better understood in relation to the book's preface, in which Mendès contrasted two commentaries written at different times to explain his changing attitude towards Wagner. The first commentary, written in 1880, marked a rupture due to the insults directed at the French in *Eine Kapitulation* (1870). The second was written after Wagner's death in 1883, when Mendès chose to forget past grievances and return to his apostolate: 'As for me, I no longer know that I had to despise and hate him. I see him again as I once knew him [...] I begin to love him again as I loved him then, and I salute his glorious dead forehead with tears.'⁵⁶ It is possible that, for Campa, Mendès's return to the Wagnerian fold wiped away old grudges. More than that, Mendès's reconciliation might have confirmed, in Campa's view, Wagner's genius and his almost messianic idea of a 'right path of evolution' supporting Campa's agenda.

This selective reading reveals how Campa used the concepts of Wagnerism and the Modern School interchangeably. According to Steven Huebner, Wagnerism is typically presented as a 'monolithic entity,' despite being a heterogeneous movement.⁵⁷ However, Campa employed the terms Wagnerism and Modern School synonymously, incorporating the composers of the *Ars Gallica* within the latter category. Campa's notion of unity has both theoretical and practical dimensions. Theoretically, he linked unity to two claims that contradict the philosophy of the *Ars Gallica* movement.⁵⁸ Firstly, he regarded Wagnerism as a universal movement that dissolves national distinctions—an idea reminiscent of Felipe Pedrell's presentation of music in *Ilustración musical hispano-americana*, where music is endowed with religious connotations that confer universality (introduced in chapter three). Secondly, Campa envisaged the unification of the Wagnerian movement as a fusion of the German and French schools, with Camille Saint-Saëns as its foremost representative. Notably, in practice, Campa grouped together composers from diverse nations and stylistic backgrounds under a single banner, presumably to align the Wagnerian movement with his own aesthetic agenda—as later criticised by Melesio Morales. More broadly, the terms 'Wagnerian' and 'Wagnerist' were synonymous with modernity in Mexico, as in Spain and Italy. Carreras has noted that

⁵⁶ 'Pour moi, je ne sais plus qu'il m'a fallu, hélas! le mépriser et le haïr. Je le revois tel que je l'ai connu jadis [...] je me reprends à l'aimer comme je l'aimais alors, et je salue en pleurant son glorieux front mort.' *Ibid.*, vii.

⁵⁷ Huebner, *French Opera...*, 13.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 14. List of books mentioned by Huebner: *Le Drame musical* (1875) by Édouard Schuré with later reproductions, *Parsifal et l'opéra wagnérien* (1883) by Edmond Hippeau, *Richard Wagner* (1886) by Catulle Mendès, *Richard Wagner: sa vie et ses oeuvres* (1886) by Adolphe Jullien, *L'oeuvre dramatique de Richard Wagner* (1886) by Albert Soubies y Charles Malherbe y *Richard Wagner et le drame contemporain: introduction* (1887) by Alfred Ernst. Campa left outside the discussion around the movement of national regeneration discussed by Schuré, Mendès, Soubies-Malherbe, Saint-Saëns, and other critics like Imbert, Madame Fuchs and Lucas.

'Wagnerist,' in this context, referred more to the use of harmonies and orchestrations associated with the most advanced German style rather than the dramaturgical system.⁵⁹

This selective appropriation of French Wagnerism also sheds light on the cultural hierarchies at play in Campa's rhetoric. In the Mexican imagination, French culture occupied a privileged position as the symbolic centre of civilisation and refinement. Quoting French critics such as Mendès, then, not only added authority to Campa's claims, but also helped project his ideas as cosmopolitan. However, the reliance on French opinion was not neutral: it reflected an internalized hierarchy in which cultural validation flowed from the European centre to the Mexican periphery.

Even within Europe, these hierarchies were distinctly structured. France, while perceived as a beacon of modernity, was also marked by ambivalence from Mexican critics, especially when compared with other Latin nations such as Spain or Italy, with which Mexicans felt a deeper cultural affinity. In this context, Spanish critics—though cited less frequently—functioned as intermediaries: closer to French modernism than Mexicans, yet still part of the Latin South. Campa's selective citation of French voices, while omitting others or reinterpreting them, reveals how cultural capital was negotiated and reframed from a peripheral standpoint.

Campa's Construction of a Wagnerian Saint-Saëns

Campa concluded that Mexicans required an external force to initiate the progress that the youth desired, and this force was Camille Saint-Saëns. At the end of March 1889, Campa published a brief article entitled 'Camilo Saint-Saëns and his next trip to the United States and Mexico' in *El nacional*, prompted by the latest news. Newspapers had printed a French cable announcing that Saint-Saëns had signed a contract to tour several American countries in the upcoming season; he would perform in major cities across the United States and Canada. The journalist concluded his piece by adding that Saint-Saëns would also extend the tour to Spanish-speaking countries: 'The composer is also contracted to visit Mexico and South America.'⁶⁰ Campa received the news with enthusiasm. The possibility of meeting one of the composers he most admired inspired him to introduce Saint-Saëns to Mexican readers. According to Campa, there were few but fervent admirers of the great *maestro* in the capital—seen as one of those living 'prophets of Art' who formed part of the collective imaginary of any

⁵⁹ Carreras, 'Wagnerismos,' 564.

⁶⁰ 'Está también contratado el reciente compositor para visitar México y Sud-América.' Gustavo E. Campa, 'Camilo Saint-Saëns y sus obras (Bosquejo crítico-biográfico),' *El nacional*, 14 April 1889, 2.

cosmopolitan musician.⁶¹ A search through local newspapers reveals that Saint-Saëns's name and music were largely unknown to Mexican audiences. A few papers from the early 1880s mentioned anecdotes about Saint-Saëns as a child prodigy. In the intervening years, the press published only irrelevant news for local musicians. As for Saint-Saëns's musical highlights, his *March heroïque, op. 34* (1870) was occasionally performed at civic events to create a solemn atmosphere. It was Campa and his circle who premiered new works as part of their broader agenda to introduce modern repertoire.

Campa also introduced Saint-Saëns for political reasons. His intention was to lend weight to the idea of progress by appealing to a European authority, thereby challenging conservative Mexican musicians. Campa listed the credentials and achievements of the French composer, writing that Saint-Saëns was 'one of the most energetic champions of musical progress in France [...] an illustrious teacher so loved and respected throughout Europe, and, in a word, a man who occupies such a high place in the contemporary musical world.'⁶² Presented as the leader of the Modern School, his presence in Mexico could finally usher in the repertoire of renowned composers such as Wagner and Massenet, as well as lesser-known figures like Chabrier, Godard, Rubinstein and Cui. Campa asked whether Mexicans would truly reject someone capable of making local art flourish once more. Once again, he accused conservative musicians of a 'tenacious spirit of opposition to everything that signifies progress and advancement'⁶³ —even if such a statement were to bring consequences upon him.

As the spokesman of an artistic youth that dreamt of an era of progress, Campa declared that the older generations were incapable of bringing such progress to the country, and his persistent critique of tradition had become increasingly intolerant. The only hope for Mexicans, he argued, was to collaborate with European artists. 'We need an authority to impose itself, a superior force to impel us, a firm and vigorous hand to plough the first furrow, and no one is better suited than Saint-Saëns to undertake and carry out such a glorious undertaking.'⁶⁴ Apparently, this younger generation was willing to collaborate with foreigners because Mexicans were incapable of building a long-lasting structure. In conclusion, Campa hoped that Saint-

⁶¹ Gustavo E. Campa, 'Camilo Saint-Saëns y su próximo viaje a los Estados Unidos y México,' *El nacional*, 29 March 1889, 2.

⁶² '[...] uno de los más enérgicos campeones del progreso musical en Francia [...] ilustre maestro tan querido y respetado en toda Europa, y, en suma, hombre que tan alto puesto ocupa en el mundo musical contemporáneo.' *Ibid.*

⁶³ 'y en ciertos círculos un tenaz espíritu de oposición a todo lo que signifique progreso y adelantamiento.' *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ 'Necesitamos una autoridad que se imponga, una fuerza superior que nos impulse, una mano firme y vigorosa que trace el primer surco, y nadie más apto que Saint-Saëns para acometer y realizar tan gloriosa empresa.' Gustavo E. Campa, 'Camilo Saint-Saëns y su próximo viaje a los Estados Unidos y México,' *El nacional*, 29 March 1889, 2.

Saëns would return to France with fond memories, such as ‘the satisfaction of having served Art with distinction in a foreign land’⁶⁵ Thus, Saint-Saëns’s visit would mark the beginning of a new era for Mexico.

The previous article served as an introduction to a major biography Campa was writing on Saint-Saëns. Campa used the biographical essay on the composer by Hugues Imbert (1842–1905) as a fundamental source.⁶⁶ Imbert’s outline comprised a preface and three chapters: biography, musician, and writer. Campa focused on the biographical material, which he combined with criticism of his Mexican colleagues. In this instance, he employed the article on Saint-Saëns as a vehicle for launching attacks on his peers— a tactic he had used in previous writings. As discussed in Chapter Three, Campa saw himself as a misunderstood composer, excluded from official musical circles. He cited the episode in which Saint-Saëns competed for the *Prix de Rome* one last time, losing because he was ahead of his time, to illustrate how composers who were initially dismissed—such as Verdi, Berlioz, Massenet, Chabrier and d’Indy—later came to influence art despite being misunderstood and excluded by important institutions and ignored by individuals of high status. ‘It is evident that the real factors for the prosperity of a brilliant artist are hard work, perseverance and faith. When he gathers such merits, his future will be secured and fame will reveal to him.’⁶⁷ A similar scenario, Campa argued, had occurred with Saint-Saëns in his youth.

Campa also censured the practice of Mexican musicians pursuing their studies in Italy, citing the conservative nature of the education they received there as a contributing factor. He provided the example of the *Prix de Rome*, awarded by the French government to students at the Conservatoire. Campa asserted that Saint-Saëns’s failure to study in Italy was inconsequential, as the conservatism of that institution would have had no impact on a spirit inclined towards progress. Similarly, composers from earlier generations—such as Berlioz, Bizet, and Massenet—viewed the journey as an opportunity for relaxation rather than a period of formal education.⁶⁸ Campa employed the adage ‘No one is a prophet in his own land’ to illustrate that even Saint-Saëns had been compelled to achieve success abroad—in England, Germany, Russia, Spain, and Portugal—in order to be praised in his native country. This was particularly

⁶⁵ ‘la satisfacción de haber merecido bien el Arte en país extraño!’ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Hugues Imbert, ‘Camille Saint-Saëns,’ *Profils des musiciens* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1888), 79–150. A footnote in the introduction provides the information of the essay’s first publication in the *Nouvelle Revue*, 1 April 1883.

⁶⁷ ‘Es evidente que el trabajo, la constancia y la fe de un artista genial son los verdaderos factores de su prosperidad: cuando reúna tales méritos asegurará su porvenir y el tiempo se encargará de revelarlo y consagrar su fama.’ Gustavo E. Campa, ‘Camilo Saint-Saëns y sus obras (Bosquejo crítico-biográfico),’ *El nacional*, 14 April 1889, 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

the case in Germany, a country that adhered to classical principles and was regarded as a model of artistic excellence. Within such a context, composers of medium stature were effectively excluded from the mainstream musical establishment. Saint-Saëns's triumph in Germany, therefore, indicated the existence of an artistic value that could not be ignored but rather had to be 'loved and applauded'.⁶⁹

Moreover, Campa drew attention to references that associated Saint-Saëns with Wagner. In particular, the portrayal of the social gatherings at Saint-Saëns's salon played a significant role. He incorporated the sections in which Imbert provided details about the individuals who frequented the salon on Mondays. Approximately half of the names mentioned by Imbert would have been unfamiliar to Mexican readers. Campa was particularly interested in the moment where musicians performed pieces recently published in Germany (especially works by Wagner) that were of interest to those considered 'true artists'. Such artists performed the music with fervour, seeking to highlight its most aesthetically pleasing aspects. Campa translated the paragraph in its entirety. The final sentence must have resonated with him 'One could say that there was a kind of apostolate at work, in which [Saint-Saëns] taught everyone the Wagnerian word... *Wagnerian!*'⁷⁰

Morales's Rebuttal through the Anti-Wagnerian Saint-Saëns

Campa had overlooked the fact that Saint-Saëns was no longer regarded as an *apôtre des théories wagnériennes*. In the preface, Imbert criticised the contradictions that Saint-Saëns presented in his latest book, *Harmonie et Mélodie* (1885), regarding his relationship with Wagner. It is not possible to determine whether Melesio Morales was aware of Imbert's opinion. However, the proposed imposition of a foreigner in Mexico prompted Morales to translate and publish, in *El nacional*, the introduction to *Harmonie et Mélodie* in three instalments, including a brief preliminary note that paved the way for refuting the fashion for Wagner's music—just as Saint-Saëns had done.⁷¹

In the introduction, Saint-Saëns acknowledged the admiration he held for the Germans, but argued that art was not a cult, but a space of freedom and tolerance where every artist should explore their own path. In contrast to the belief that a composer should pledge loyalty to

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ 'Puede decirse que había ahí una especie de apostolado, adonde [Saint-Saëns] enseñaba a todos la palabra...wagneriana!' Gustavo E. Campa, 'Camillo Saint-Saëns y sus obras (Bosquejo crítico-biográfico),' *El nacional*, 7 May 1889, 1. 'Il faisait là, on peut le dire, une sorte d'apostolat et enseignait à tous la parole... wagnérienne!' Imbert, *Profils des musiciens*, 96.

⁷¹ Páris [Melesio Morales], 'Saint-Saëns y Wagner,' *El nacional*, 23 April 1889, 2; 24 April 1889, 2–3; 30 April 1889, 1–2.

any particular school, Saint-Saëns defended the right to consider himself an eclectic and to nourish his creativity through a variety of styles.

In the preliminary note, Morales acknowledged that he had studied and performed some works by the French composer. Although he did not specify which ones, he was probably referring to the symphonic poems *La jeunesse d'Hercule* and *Danse macabre*, performed by the Society of Concerts of the National Conservatoire in 1888.⁷² It was important for Morales to reveal his familiarity with Saint-Saëns's works and writings, as it elevated him to a position from which he could challenge Campa, the champion of the modern school in Mexico. Furthermore, Morales discussed the Italian school—a broad concept referring to the *bel canto* repertoire but used interchangeably with the term 'melodic school'—as the basis of Saint-Saëns's style: 'based on the laws of Italian melody like those of Adam, Boieldieu, Auber, Gounod, Bizet, Thomas, etc., [and which] enjoys our sincere sympathy.'⁷³ Morales exaggerated the importance that Saint-Saëns attributed to the Italian ensemble in *Lohengrin*. The Frenchman had argued that even Wagner contradicted his own theories, as the Wagnerian system was constantly changing.⁷⁴ Morales, however, paraphrased Saint-Saëns in order to demonstrate the enduring dominance of the Italian school—even among German composers.

After bringing the Italian school into the discussion, Morales defended his right as a composer to write eclectic music in opposition to Campa's campaign, stating that '[the French school] enjoys our sincere sympathies, being as we are, admirers of beauty, without distinction of form and wherever it is to be found.'⁷⁵ For Morales, beauty was the essential quality of music, inherited from *bel canto*, and his preference for melody became an aesthetic banner against Campa's inclination towards harmony as a sign of progress.

Morales criticised the influence Wagner had on modern musical aesthetics. First, he considered Wagner a nihilist who had capitulated to convention, rather than a revolutionary or a messiah.⁷⁶ The theories Wagner developed were, in Morales's view, reductive models that impoverished the richness and diversity of musical language. Saint-Saëns had once complained: 'Wagner launched into the world a fertile idea: that lyric drama was the drama of the future, and that in order for it to advance resolutely toward its goal, it had to be freed from

⁷² Alejandro, 'Impresiones tristes y alegres,' *La patria ilustrada*, no. 35 (2 September 1889): 410–411.

⁷³ 'cuyo estilo, basado en las leyes de la melodía italiana a semejanza de los de Adán [sic], Boieldieu, Auber, Gounod, Bizet, Thomas, etc., goza de nuestras sinceras simpatías [...] Páris, 'Saint-Saëns y Wagner,' *El nacional*, 23 April 1889, 2.

⁷⁴ Saint-Saëns, *Harmonie et mélodie*, xxvi.

⁷⁵ 'goza de nuestras sinceras simpatías, siendo como somos, amante de lo bello, sin distinción de formas y donde quiera que se encuentre.' Páris, 'Saint-Saëns y Wagner,' *El nacional*, 23 April 1889, 2.

⁷⁶ Páris [Melesio Morales], 'Crónica musical. El Trovador,' *El nacional*, 22 November 1883, 1–2. During the opera season of 1883, Morales criticised Verdi for imitating Wagner.

the impediments of the old opera—the demands of singers and the inanities of routine. This idea he expressed in his own way, and that way, excellent for him, is by that very fact detestable for others.’⁷⁷ Morales emphasised the final sentence of this paragraph with italics and capitalised the word ‘DETESTABLE’ in Spanish, in order to underscore the challenges faced by non-Wagnerians. From Morales’s perspective, Wagner privileged ‘noisy’ sounds that disrupted the balance of the orchestra and favoured harmony over melody, neglecting the creation of beautiful melodic lines that rendered music memorable: his music was simply too German. Morales thus revisited a foundational narrative of the Mexican Philharmonic Society founded in 1866, which constructed its identity as the heir to the Greco-Roman world. The goal of this group was to make Mexico ‘the Italy of America’.⁷⁸ Music, therefore, was associated with warmth, passion, and feeling—in contrast to cerebral and scientific Anglo-Saxon music, which was largely inaccessible to most Mexican listeners.

As early as 1883, Morales was aware of the changing tastes of European audiences as a consequence of what he termed ‘the influence of the Wagnerian crisis’.⁷⁹ He could not understand why Wagner’s ‘cacophonous music’ was seducing audiences across the globe.⁸⁰ In the introduction to *Harmonie et Mélodie*, Saint-Saëns adopted a sarcastic tone to denounce the way in which French critics had come to celebrate *Lohengrin*, leading audiences to embrace a work they had previously rejected. Morales highlighted, in italics, the words that would prove to Mexican readers that even Saint-Saëns agreed on how ‘horrible’ Wagner’s music was:

It so happened that while he was acquiring his rightful place in the musical world, the press and the bugles of fame took it upon themselves to hype him unconditionally and scandalously. The Parisian public listened to the press with such adhesion that those who used to cover their ears to avoid hearing the sweetness of *Lohengrin* howled with pleasure and cried out ‘repeat it for a second time’ when they heard the exciting but horrifying cacophonies, which are to music what pickles are to cooking. And well: if an ‘objective’ point of view changes, is it not natural to change one’s point of view as well? The contrary would be astonishing...⁸¹

⁷⁷ ‘Wagner a lancé dans le monde une idée féconde, c’est que le drame lyrique était le drame de l’avenir et qu’il fallait, pour lui permettre de marcher résolument vers son but, le débarrasser des *impedimenta* de l’ancien opéra, des exigences des chanteurs et des niaiseries de la routine. Cette idée, il l’a traduite à sa manière, et cette manière, excellente pour lui, est par cela même détestable pour les autres.’ Saint-Saëns, *Harmonie et mélodie*, xxvi.

⁷⁸ For the inaugural address read by director Agustín Caballero at the opening of the Conservatoire, see: ‘Discurso pronunciado por el Sr. Director del Conservatorio de la Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana, D. Agustín Caballero, en la solemne apertura de este establecimiento,’ *La armonía*, no. 2 (15 November 1866): 10.

⁷⁹ París [Melesio Morales] ‘Crónica musical. *El Trovador*,’ *El nacional*, 22 November 1833, 1.

⁸⁰ While Wagner’s operas were not regularly staged in Paris until the early 1890s, some Mexican critics mistakenly believed that Wagner had already won over Parisian audiences following the controversial 1861 premiere of *Tannhäuser*. This perception persisted despite the well-known failure of that performance and likely stemmed from second-hand reports or generalisations in French criticism.

⁸¹ ‘Sucedió que mientras adquiría en el mundo musical el lugar que le tocaba, la prensa y las cornetas de la fama se encargaban de hacer bombo de un modo incondicional y escandaloso. El público parisiense dio

However, Saint-Saëns was in fact paraphrasing anti-Wagnerian vocabulary that had been used in earlier debates. His intention was to mock the shift in Parisian taste in recent decades.

Saint-Saëns opposed the dogmatism which had spread in the press through the use of religious vocabulary. Wagnerians employed terms such as ‘sacrilege,’ ‘God,’ and ‘prophet,’ creating the image of a cult that marginalised other composers. For Morales, it was imperative to resist the dogmatism propagated by Campa in the local press, where the latter portrayed himself as a priest of a universal religion in which great composers were prophets and Wagner the awaited messiah. Moreover, Campa’s comments had grown increasingly intolerant over the years, censoring any music that did not align with his idea of modernity and discrediting fellow composers who did not belong to his circle. Morales voiced his opinion through Saint-Saëns’s words:

Deep down, it is not Bach, Beethoven, or Wagner that I love; it is art. I am eclectic. This claim can be described as deficient, but I cannot correct it; I cannot go against my way of being. Besides, I am a staunch supporter of freedom of worship, and I do not suffer idols to be imposed on me. Enthusiasms of the highest order freeze the blood in my veins and stiffen my faculties to the point of preventing me from enjoying the most beautiful creations.⁸²

For Morales and Saint-Saëns, Wagnerism was but one style among many; artists should follow their own paths, schools, and styles.

The final part of the translation contained further additions. In conclusion, Saint-Saëns encouraged young composers to be themselves and to ignore the judgement of critics. Morales highlighted Saint-Saëns’s advice using capital letters, in an effort to embolden Mexican composers against Campa’s disdain for local aesthetics: ‘YOUNG MUSICIANS: IF YOU WANT TO BE SOMETHING, BE YOURSELVES; BELONG TO YOUR TIME AND COUNTRY! (How much wisdom is contained in these words!)’⁸³ The translator subtly modified the original for local purposes by deleting the words *restez Français!* from the original phrasing: ‘[...] si vous voulez

oídos a la prensa con tal adhesión, que aquél que antes haciendo gestos se tapaba los oídos por no escuchar las dulzuras de Lohengrin, aúlla de placer y grita ‘otro’ al oír cacofonías excitantes pero horripilantes, que son a la música lo que a la cocina los *picles*. Y bien: si pues varía de punto objetivo ¿no es natural variar de opinión? Lo contrario asombraría.’ Páris, ‘Saint-Saëns y Wagner,’ *El nacional*, 23 April 1889, 2.

⁸² ‘En el fondo, no es Bach, ni Beethoven, ni Wagner lo que yo amo; es el arte. Soy ecléctico. Esto podrá calificarse de muy defectuoso, pero no me es posible corregirlo; no puedo contrariar mi modo de ser. Además, soy partidario acérrimo de la libertad de culto y no sufro que se me impongan ídolos. Los entusiasmos de orden suprema me hielan la sangre en las venas y enervan mis facultades al grado de impedirme gustar de las más hermosas creaciones.’ Páris, ‘Saint-Saëns y Wagner,’ *El nacional*, 24 April 1889, 2–3.

⁸³ ‘Así pasa al menos en nuestra hermosa Francia! JÓVENES MÚSICOS: SI QUEREIS SER ALGO, SED VOSOTROS MISMOS; DE VUESTRO TIEMPO Y DE VUESTRO PAÍS! (Cuánta sabiduría encierran estas palabras!).’ Páris ‘Saint-Saëns y Wagner,’ *El nacional*, 30 April 1889, 1–2

être quelque chose, restez Français! Soyez vous-mêmes [...]’.⁸⁴ In the final three paragraphs, Morales emboldened his text to emphasise those of Saint-Saëns’s conclusions that he himself endorsed:

Last word

I deeply admire the works of Ricardo Wagner. Despite their flaws, they are great and elevated. That is enough!

But I have never been, nor am I, nor will I ever be of the Wagnerist religion.⁸⁵

The polemic between Morales and Campa continued for several months after the publication of the introduction to *Harmonie et Mélodie*. Morales remained sceptical about the proposed visit of Saint-Saëns, which ultimately did not take place.

The confrontation between Campa and Morales reveals how French music criticism—and particularly debates around Wagnerism—was appropriated and reconfigured in the Mexican press as a tool for aesthetic and ideological positioning. Both figures mobilised the authority of Saint-Saëns in opposing ways: Campa invoked him as a herald of musical modernity, while Morales weaponised his more recent anti-dogmatic writings to defend eclecticism and melodic tradition. In doing so, they transformed the French critical field into a symbolic battleground for local disputes about taste, authority, and the future of national music.

This selective appropriation of French Wagnerism also sheds light on the cultural hierarchies embedded in Campa’s rhetoric. French culture occupied a privileged position in the Mexican imagination—as a symbolic centre of civilisation and refinement—making references to critics like Mendès or Fouque highly authoritative. Yet this reliance was not neutral: it reflected an internalised hierarchy in which cultural legitimacy flowed from Europe to the Mexican periphery. Even within Europe, however, these hierarchies were uneven. While France was a beacon of modernity, Mexican critics often felt a stronger cultural affinity with Latin nations such as Spain or Italy. Spanish and Italian progressive critics—though cited less frequently—played a crucial role in shaping Campa’s reformist outlook. Figures like Marsillach and Boito offered a valuable Latin lineage for modernist aspirations. Boito, in particular, had denounced the stagnation of Italian operatic forms and advocated for a new kind of musical drama rooted in structural coherence and intellectual depth. For Campa, the idea that Wagner had ‘triumphed’ over Italian tradition, as suggested by some Spanish and Italian critics, served as a powerful narrative device to legitimise his reformist stance in Mexico.

⁸⁴ Saint-Saëns, *Harmonie et mélodie*, xxix.

⁸⁵ ‘Última palabra [/] Admiro profundamente las obras de Ricardo Wagner. No obstante sus defectos, son grandes y elevados. Esto basta! [/] Pero jamás he sido, ni soy, ni seré de la religión wagneriana.’ Páris ‘Saint-Saëns y Wagner,’ *El nacional*, 30 April 1889, 2.

The debates explored in this chapter were not confined to theoretical texts, but also emerged through the critical reception of operatic performance. The Mexican premieres of *La Gioconda*, *Otello*, and *Mefistofele* became key occasions to test and contest the boundaries of musical progressivism. These operas opened a space for critics to measure the merits of modern Italian music against Wagnerian ideals. The image of Giovanna Lucca, wife of the publisher who held the rights to Wagner's music in Italy, 'crowning' Wagner at Bayreuth, became a striking metaphor: a symbolic gesture that pressured conservative critics to acknowledge the cultural dominance of German opera, or at least to reckon with its growing prestige.

Ultimately, the debate between Campa and Morales was not merely about Wagner or Saint-Saëns—it was about who could speak for modernity, and from where. Mexican critics adapted European texts not only as aesthetic references but as rhetorical strategies to navigate cultural marginalisation, often imposed by the very civilisation that devalued them for belonging to a peripheral Latin nation. The tensions between tradition and reform, Italianism and Germanism, became embodied in a musical culture deeply entangled with transnational influences. Although Morales appeared to close the polemic with a categorical rejection of 'the Wagnerist religion,' the debate continued throughout the remainder of 1889, leaving the question of who, ultimately, had the authority to interpret and judge the music of the future unresolved-

In the final months of 1889, the Mexican musical press became a battlefield. The translation that Melesio Morales published in *El nacional*, taken from Camille Saint-Saëns's *Harmonie et mélodie* in order to prove Campa wrong, infuriated the young critic. The debate escalated quickly: Morales accused Campa of attempting to impose a foreign, Germanic sensibility on Mexican audiences, while Campa replied that the true decadence lay in the repetitive Italianate melodies to which Mexican composers had long conformed. Their duel of words extended across the remainder of the year, with Campa also maintaining a parallel polemical front in *El tiempo* against Ildefonso de Olano. These disputes were not marginal exchanges; they crystallised wider anxieties about the nation's artistic future, the authority of European models, and Mexico's capacity to define its place in the modern world.

The debates of 1889 soon acquired a concrete counterpart on the stage of the National Theatre. In November 1890, Napoleón Sieni's Italian opera company presented *Lohengrin* to the Mexican public for the first time, followed in the spring of 1891 by Emma Juch's English company, which staged *Tannhäuser*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, and *Die Walküre*. In this way, the names and ideas that had circulated in print were embodied in performance. Wagner was no longer discussed exclusively through translations, polemics, or occasional concert excerpts; he was now present

Chapter 4

in Mexico City's most prestigious theatre. The polemics of the late 1880s, and particularly those of 1889, should therefore be understood not only as a prelude to these performances but also as part of the cultural preparation that rendered them legible to Mexican audiences, positioning Wagner as a marker of civilisation and modernity.

Conclusions

This dissertation demonstrates that the musical modernity articulated by Gustavo Campa and his contemporaries formed part of a broader transnational negotiation of civilisation and national identity, challenging nationalist and centre–periphery narratives that have long reduced nineteenth-century Mexico to imitation or cultural delay.

One of the central questions of this dissertation has been why the modernist and cosmopolitan aspirations of figures such as Campa have been consistently overlooked. The answer lies largely in the historiographical frameworks through which nineteenth-century Mexican music has been interpreted. Modernity has long been equated with the nationalist avant-garde of the early twentieth century, particularly with composers such as Carlos Chávez, whose work came to symbolise a decisive cultural rupture. Within this narrative, Mexico appeared to achieve modernity only after the Revolution of 1910, through the consolidation of a national school rooted in pre-Hispanic and folkloric materials.

This post-revolutionary framework shaped the canonisation of nineteenth-century composers and critics. Those who did not conform to a nationalist aesthetic were frequently portrayed as imitators of European models, their cosmopolitanism interpreted as cultural dependency. At the same time, centre–periphery models reinforced the assumption that Mexican intellectuals merely reproduced foreign ideas with minimal adaptation, reducing them to passive recipients within a global hierarchy of influence.

The nineteenth-century press, however, reveals that the modernisation of musical culture in Mexico was already being actively debated decades before 1910. From the early years of independence in 1821, discussions of progress, refinement and participation in the community of ‘civilised’ nations formed part of broader projects of nation-building. Modernity was understood as a long cultural process intertwined with ideas of civilisation, cosmopolitanism and international belonging.

Reframing modernity as continuity rather than disruption alters our understanding of nineteenth-century Mexican musical life. Despite political instability and economic difficulty, cultural actors sustained an intense concert life and a vibrant critical discourse comparable to contemporary European practices. Moreover, the rhetoric of ‘backwardness’ often attributed to later historiography was already present in nineteenth-century writings themselves. Figures such as Campa did not invent this language; they inherited and reworked it within ongoing liberal debates about progress. In this light, civilisation, progress and modernity emerge as contested and evolving aspirations embedded within the intellectual life of the century.

Conclusions

Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the civilising aspirations of nineteenth-century Mexican elites, frequently highlighting the centrality of opera and musical refinement within broader projects of cultural modernisation. Such approaches have often emphasised these aspirations as expressions of national pride and as evidence of Mexico's participation in global cultural life. Indeed, the language of civilisation recurs insistently in the musical press of the period, where belonging to the group of civilised nations was presented as an essential component of nation-state formation.

However, a closer examination of these narratives complicates this celebratory reading. While the rhetoric of civilisation articulated genuine aspirations towards refinement, universalism and cosmopolitan legitimacy, it also functioned within asymmetrical global structures of value. Civilisation operated beyond an ideal to be attained; it became a hierarchy to be internalised and reproduced. In this context, the adoption of European aesthetic standards did not simply reflect admiration or imitation; it participated in an informal imperial logic in which local actors themselves sustained and disseminated normative models of cultural authority.

Figures such as Luis F. Muñoz Ledo, Campa and Morales must therefore be understood as historically situated intellectuals navigating inherited structures of prestige and exclusion. Their desire to align Mexico with recognised centres of cultural authority was shaped by centuries of colonial subordination to the Spanish Empire and by the aspiration to achieve legitimacy within a Eurocentric order. Whether consciously or not, their critical discourse contributed to the regulation of taste and to the pedagogical framing of citizens as subjects to be refined and educated. Musical criticism thus operated as a civilising instrument: rather than evangelising colonial subjects, it instructed modern citizens in the codes of cultivated belonging.

This perspective alters the moral simplicity with which nineteenth-century elites have sometimes been judged. Rather than dismissing them as merely 'Europeanised' or celebrating them uncritically as enlightened reformers, this dissertation situates their actions within the ambivalent dynamics of informal imperialism. The legacy of these dynamics continues to shape perceptions of classical music in Mexico, where it is still associated with social distinction and cultural hierarchy.

This dissertation reinterprets nineteenth-century Mexican musical culture through the lens of cultural transfer. Rather than approaching intellectual exchange as a process of imitation, it foregrounds the agency of individuals operating within networks of reading, sociability, and institutional affiliation. Within this framework, ideas circulated as dynamic materials that were appropriated, reframed, and strategically redeployed in response to local concerns. To understand Campa's quarrel in the late nineteenth century, it is therefore

Conclusions

necessary to trace the intellectual genealogy of these debates back to 1866, when the Sociedad Filarmónica Mexicana (Mexican Philharmonic Society, MPS) founded its journal *La armonía* (November 1866–May 1867).

Though short-lived, *La armonía* articulated a vocabulary—progress, civilisation, cosmopolitanism, and the moral power of music—that would shape debates for decades. Its members presented Mexico as a nation in need of regeneration through artistic cultivation, drawing on Romantic notions of genius and sacrifice to frame music as an intellectual and civic mission. In doing so, they moved beyond the mere reproduction of European narratives about composers.

Through biographical sketches and fictional narratives, the journal constructed a musical past organised around the ideals of civilisation and progress. These texts formed part of a deliberate strategy to situate Mexican musical life within European Romantic discourse, asserting that Mexico, too, could participate in the universal vocation of art. At the same time, they promoted secular musical education and employed the metaphor of music as medicine for a ‘sick’ nation—borrowed from European discourse—to articulate its social utility within a civilised society.

The MPS thus inaugurated the discursive field within which later generations would operate. The young musicians who challenged the Conservatoire in the late 1880s did not emerge in isolation; they inherited a vocabulary of progress and civilisation forged decades earlier. Read retrospectively, the Philharmonic Society acquires renewed significance: the rhetoric of regeneration and seriousness that animated its pages resurfaced in Campa’s later defence of harmonic depth and artistic discipline, as well as in the cosmopolitan alignments that shaped Mexico’s transatlantic exchanges. The struggle to define Mexican musical modernity, therefore, did not begin with the quarrels of 1889 but was rooted in earlier efforts to reconcile national aspiration with European cultural authority.

In Campa’s case, the adaptation of European aesthetic discourse followed a similar logic. His presentation of figures such as Richard Wagner and Camille Saint-Saëns repositioned them within Mexican debates about progress, authority, and artistic legitimacy. Wagner could be framed as the emblem of a new aesthetic order or as the founder of a school transcending narrow nationalisms. Campa deployed these representations strategically in order to situate Mexican musical discourse within what local progressists perceived as the most advanced currents of European thought.

This perspective challenges the centre–periphery model that has long structured interpretations of nineteenth-century musical history. Within that framework, aesthetic

Conclusions

positions aligned with German symphonic thought are coded as progressive, while alternative orientations are relegated to belated survivals, equating historical value with proximity to a presumed European centre. The case of Morales unsettles this hierarchy. Rather than representing an ‘outdated’ resistance to progress, his defence of Italian aesthetics articulated a coherent and historically grounded vision of musical modernity—one embedded in different traditions of authority, sensibility, and cultural affiliation. Morales thus emerges not as a peripheral echo of a superseded past, but as the expression of a parallel aesthetic rationality coexisting within the same temporal horizon. Recognising this simultaneity forces us to reconsider the criteria through which we define progress and to question the historiographical privileges that have elevated certain voices, such as Campa’s, while marginalising others.

Central to this process was the press. Musical periodicals and daily newspapers functioned as active agents in the construction of cultural authority. Through journals such as *La armonía* (1866–67), *El polífono* (1888–89), and *Ilustración musical hispano-americana* (1888–1896), as well as dailies including *El diario del hogar*, *El nacional*, *El tiempo* and *La patria*, critics debated the meaning of progress, the relationship between Mexico and Europe, and the role of art in national life. These discussions shaped repertoires, framed composers and instructed audiences in the norms of cultivated listening.

By reading together musical criticism, fictional narratives, translations and correspondence, this dissertation demonstrates that the press constituted a discursive field in which cultural authority was negotiated. The press was not a peripheral commentary on musical life; it was the primary arena in which Mexico’s place within global modernity was imagined, debated, and contested.

This dissertation argues that the opposition between Italianism, French influence, and Germanisation in late nineteenth-century Mexico functioned less as a strictly musical taxonomy than as a set of identity labels. These aesthetic allegiances articulated competing visions of cultural belonging within a cosmopolitan elite that understood itself as heir to classical antiquity and to the Latin world of Southern Europe.

While other artistic and intellectual fields in Mexico increasingly sought to reclaim the pre-Hispanic past during the late nineteenth century—particularly in architecture, painting, archaeology, and historiography—musical discourse remained oriented towards European lineages. Within this framework, ‘Latin’ identity did not correspond to the later notion of Latin America but referred to a transatlantic cultural affiliation with Romance languages, Catholic tradition, and Greco-Roman heritage. Centuries of Spanish rule, the presence of French imperial ambitions and their close entanglement with Mexican cultural elites, as well as the long-standing dominance of Italian opera in Mexican theatres, reinforced this sense of affinity.

Conclusions

The recurrent opposition between melody and harmony condensed these broader identifications into a rhetorically powerful dichotomy. Melody, associated with Italian opera, was aligned with sensibility, vocal expressiveness, and a perceived Latin temperament; harmony, linked to German symphonic and operatic traditions, signified structural depth, intellectual rigour, and scientific modernity. This polarity exceeded technical musical concerns and provided critics with a vocabulary through which to debate authority, legitimacy, and the cultural direction of the nation.

Yet this binary should not obscure the mediating role of French culture. Throughout the nineteenth century, France functioned both as a conduit for the circulation of aesthetic ideas within Europe and across the Atlantic, and as an aesthetic interlocutor positioning itself between Italian melodicism and German symphonic thought. The presence of French imperial ambitions in Mexico and the close cultural ties between French intellectual life and Mexican elites further complicated this landscape, introducing additional layers of identification and aspiration that cannot be reduced to a simple Latin–German opposition.

The confrontations of 1889 between Morales and Campa should therefore not be reduced to disagreements over taste. They reflected competing models of cosmopolitanism and divergent understandings of Mexico's place within European modernity. Morales's defence of Italian aesthetics articulated a historically grounded Latin affiliation, while Campa's advocacy of German music projected a reorientation towards what he perceived as the most advanced currents of contemporary culture.

The concept of aesthetic polarisation between melody and harmony thus offers an analytical tool for reinterpreting Mexican musical criticism. Rather than treating Italian and German traditions as fixed and self-contained categories, this perspective emphasises their rhetorical deployment. Mexican critics mobilised these labels to construct narratives of decadence, renewal, authority, and belonging. In doing so, they revealed that late nineteenth-century musical debates were expressions of a cosmopolitan identity negotiated within a stratified and asymmetrical global order whose tensions would continue to shape musical debates well into the twentieth century.

More significantly, reducing the quarrel to a binary struggle between Italianism and French influence obscures its international dimensions. The debate articulated competing models of musical modernity within a transnational field of reference. Campa and his allies promoted Franco-German repertoire as emblematic of artistic regeneration, drawing on French and Spanish Wagnerian literature to frame Richard Wagner as a symbol of progress and civilisational renewal. The foundation of the Instituto Musical Campa-Hernández Acevedo in 1886 formed part of this broader attempt to redefine institutional and aesthetic authority.

Conclusions

Defenders of Italian opera, including Morales, upheld an alternative cosmopolitan orientation rooted in Latin continuity and long-standing operatic traditions. The quarrel thus juxtaposed distinct international alignments rather than opposing nationalism to foreign influence. By 1888–89, with Campa's engagement with Felipe Pedrell and the intensification of polemics in the press, the debate became explicitly embedded within wider European discussions on decadence, reform, and artistic legitimacy.

When Wagner's operas finally reached the National Theatre in 1890, their reception crystallised years of discursive preparation. The quarrel appears, in retrospect, not as a simple generational revolt but as a sustained negotiation over which version of modernity Mexican musical culture should adopt within an asymmetrical global order.

The nineteenth-century Mexican intellectual milieu was characterised by erudition, social capital, and a markedly polymathic ethos. Its actors participated in a shared culture mediated through print, moving fluidly across domains that today would be considered distinct disciplines. Rather than operating within narrowly defined professional boundaries, they combined composition, translation, pedagogy, political commentary, literary production, and musical criticism as part of a coherent intellectual practice.

Modern historiography, shaped by disciplinary specialization, has sometimes obscured this integrative logic. The nineteenth century is frequently read through rigid dichotomies—Latin versus Germanic, melody versus harmony, progress versus backwardness—that risk flattening the complexity of intellectual life. Many journal articles appear as isolated fragments, often omitting explicit references to interlocutors or contexts; yet when examined collectively, they reveal dense networks of exchange and shared assumptions.

A central insight of this study is therefore the polymathic nature of these intellectual networks. Mexican musicians, critics, and scholars engaged simultaneously with aesthetic, pedagogical, and political questions, situating musical debates within broader reflections on civilisation, education, and national development. Their transatlantic exchanges with Spain, France, and Italy created a vibrant space of circulation in which ideas were adapted and strategically redeployed. Campa's engagement with French Wagnerian literature, his collaboration with Felipe Pedrell in Barcelona, and his polemics with both Italian and Mexican composers demonstrate that Mexican musical criticism formed part of a wider European conversation.

Reading these actors exclusively through the lens of modern disciplinary specialization risks diminishing the scope of their agency and creativity. The Mexican Philharmonic Society's connections with international circles that promoted musical Romanticism as a remedy for

Conclusions

cultural 'stagnation,' as well as Campa's participation in debates over Wagnerism as a path toward artistic renewal, illustrate the extent to which local projects were articulated within global frameworks. Cultural modernisation in Mexico was thus imagined and negotiated through sustained engagement with transnational intellectual networks.

The findings of this dissertation suggest several avenues for future research. First, they open the way for a more sustained exploration of Wagnerism beyond the European centres most commonly studied. While Bayreuth, Paris, and London remain indispensable to the history of Wagner's reception, this dissertation demonstrates that debates in Mexico reveal equally significant dynamics of appropriation, translation, and reinterpretation. The study of Wagnerism in Latin America, and in the Hispanic world more broadly, remains in its early stages. By situating Mexico within these networks, this dissertation invites future scholarship to consider Wagnerism as a global phenomenon.

Second, the analysis of nineteenth-century Mexican criticism points to the potential of integrating musicology with intellectual and cultural history. By treating musical polemics as part of broader debates on civilisation, cosmopolitanism, and identity, this study demonstrates how music functioned as a site of intellectual labour. This approach could be extended to other repertoires and contexts, such as the reception of Verdi or Meyerbeer in Latin America, or the role of Spanish critics in shaping transatlantic debates. In each case, music served as a lens through which questions of progress and cultural authority were negotiated.

Third, this dissertation underscores the value of examining the press as a cultural archive. Far from being secondary role in concert life, the press was where repertoires were framed, composers were judged, and national aspirations were articulated. The Mexican case shows that fictional narratives, biographical sketches, and translations should be read alongside concert reviews, since together they created a discursive field in which audiences were taught how to listen, how to judge, and how to imagine themselves as modern. Extending this methodology to other Latin American contexts could provide a richer picture of how the press mediated the global circulation of music in the nineteenth century.

Finally, the emphasis on transatlantic networks suggests the need for more comparative work. The exchanges between Mexico, Spain, France, and Italy described here were not unique: similar circuits linked Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Havana, and Barcelona. A comparative perspective could illuminate how Latin American cities participated in the redefinition of modernity at the fin de siècle, and how music served as a medium for asserting both local distinctiveness and cosmopolitan aspiration.

Conclusions

The conclusion of this dissertation, then, is that Mexican musical life in the late nineteenth century should not be understood in isolation. It was shaped by local institutions and debates, but also by the transatlantic circulation of texts, ideas, and repertoires. By reading criticism, fiction, and polemics together, we can see how Mexican intellectuals used music to negotiate their identity as both national and cosmopolitan. Their struggles remind us that the search for modernity was an active reinterpretation, rather than a passive reception.

The circulation of ideas functioned not as imitation, but as creative reinterpretation within an asymmetrical global order.

Appendix A Concert Programmes (1884–1886)

A.1 Charity Concert at the Tívoli de San Cosme

Date: 12 October 1884.

Place: Tívoli de San Cosme salon, Mexico City.

Source: Gustavo E. Campa, 'Una fiesta musical (Concierto en el Tívoli de San Cosme),' *La patria*, 21 October 1884, 2.

	Title	Composer (and arreglist)	Performers
1	Potpurri sobre motivos del <i>Freischütz</i> para piano, violín y violoncello [Ouvertures célèbres arrangées pour piano, violon et violoncelle]	Carl Maria von Weber	Julio Ituarte (piano), Antonio Figueroa (violin) y Gustavo Guichenné (cello)
2	Mignon: romanza del último acto	Ambroise Thomas	Adrián Guichenné (tenor)
3	Fantasia sobre <i>Semiramis</i> (1860) [Grande Fantasia dramatique sur Semiramis de Rossini]	Joseph Ascher	Julio Ituarte
4	Le Pré aux clercs: aria	Ferdinand Hérold	Rosa Palacios (soprano), Lubet (piano), Antonio Figueroa (violin)
5	Aire variado [Variations sur un Air Allemand, op. 22]	Theobald Boehm	Meerts (flute)
6.1	Elegía [<i>Elegie</i> , op. 10]	Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst	Antonio Figueroa (violin)
6.2	Elegía [Adagio élégiaque, Op. 5?]	Henryk Wieniawski	Antonio Figueroa (violin)
6.3	Mazurka [op. 19, no. 1, 'Obertas']	Henryk Wieniawski	Antonio Figueroa (violin)
Interval			

Appendix A

7	Aria de la Iglesia [<i>Aria di Chiesa/Kirchenarie (Pietà signore)</i>]	Alessandro Stradella	Lubet (piano), Antonio Figueroa (violin), Gustavo Guichenné (cello)
8	Fausto: Cavatina (with violín accompainment)	Charles Gounod	Adrián Guichenné (tenor), Antonio Figueroa (violin)
9	Aires Nacionales [<i>Ecos de México</i>]	Julio Ituarte	Julio Ituarte (piano)
10	Musica proibita [op. 5]	Stanislao Gastaldon Vincenzo Bellini	Rosa Palacios (soprano)
11	Las gotas de agua [<i>Les Gouttes d'Eau, Caprice- Étude, op. 17</i>]	Joseph Ascher	Lubet (piano)
12	Aida: duo de amor	Giuseppe Verdi	Rosa Palacios (soprano), Adrián Guichenné (tenor)
13	Fantasia sobre motivos de <i>Fausto</i> para violín [<i>Fantasie brillante sur des motifs de l'Opéra Faust de Gounod, op. 20.</i>]	Henryk Wieniawski	Antonio Figueroa (violin)

A.2 Teodoro Curant's Vocal and Instrumental Benefit Concert

Date: 5 August 1885.

Place: Salon of Gante Street no. 5, Mexico City.

Source: 'Gacetilla. Concierto,' *El siglo diez y nueve*, 27 August 1885, 3.

	Title	Composer (and arreglist)	Performers
1	Serenata	Witt	Orfeón alemán (choir)
2	Freischütz: Grande Aria de Agatha	Carl Maria von Weber	Rosa Palacios (soprano)
3	Souvenir de Bellini (solo para violín)	Artot	Teodoro Curant (violin)
4	Danse slave (D dur)	Antonin Dvořák	Gustavo E. Campa (piano)
5	Gavota (A moll) a cuatro manos	Gustavo E. Campa	Ricardo Castro (piano), Gustavo E. Campa (piano)
6	Una hoja de álbum (arreglado para violoncello solo, harmonio y cuarteto de cuerda)	Richard Wagner (arr. Gustavo E. Campa)	Luis David (cello solo), Teodoro Curant (violin), Gabriel Unda y Galindo (violin), Pedro Manzano (viola), Manuel Peralta (cello)
7	Guillermo Tell: gran dúo	Léonard	Teodoro Curant (violin), Clara Hallaran (piano)
8	La nozze di Figaro: arieta	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Rosa Palacios (soprano)
9	Noturno (b moll)	Ricardo Castro	Ricardo Castro (piano)
10	Polonesa (a dur)	Ricardo Castro	Ricardo Castro (piano)
11	Trío B dur	Ludwig van Beethoven	Teodoro Curant (violin), Luis David (cello), Felipe Villanueva (piano)

A.3 Annovazzi's Vocal and Instrumental Benefit Concert

Date: 28 October 1885.

Place: National Theatre, Mexico City.

Source: 'Concierto a beneficio,' *El tiempo*, 25 October 1885, 4.

	Title	Composer (and arreglist)	Performers
1	Tarantela	Joachim Riff	Ricardo Castro (piano)
2	Le donne curiose: romanza	Wolf-Ferrari	Annovazzi (tenor)
3	Sonámbula: rondo	Vincenzo Bellini	Carmen Unda (soprano)
4	I vespri siciliani: aria	Giuseppe Verdi	Manuel Múgica (bass)
5	Aria	Philipp Scharwenka	Luis David (cello)
6	Dinorah: aria	Giacomo Meyerbeer	Virginia Galván (soprano)
7	Carmen: duo	Georges Bizet	Carmen Unda (soprano), Annovazzi (tenor)
8	Second Scherzo	Frédéric Chopin	Ricardo Castro (piano)
Interval			
9	Il barbero di Seviglia: serenata	Gioachino Rossini	Annovazzi (tenor)
10	Il Guarany: serenata	Carlos Gomes	Margarita Hernández (soprano)
11	Gavota	Gustavo E. Campa	Ricardo Castro (piano)
12	Il matrimonio segreto: terzetto	Domenico Cimarosa	Virginia Galván (soprano), Carmen Unda (soprano), Margarita Hernández (soprano)
13	Don Pasquale: serenata	Gaetano Donizetti	Annovazzi (canto)
14	Don Pasqueales: nocturno	Gaetano Donizetti	Virginia Galván (soprano), Annovazzi (tenor)

A.4 Poor people's Vocal and Instrumental Benefit Concert

Date: 30 October 1885.

Place: Salon of Gante Street no. 5, Mexico City.

Source: 'Gacetilla. Concierto vocal e instrumental,' *El diario del hogar*, 30 October 1885, 3.

	Title	Composer (and arreglist)	Performers
1	Dos canciones sin palabras	Felix Mendelssohn	[Miss] Le Hurray (piano)
2	In der Ferne: canción	Friedrich Silcher	Doble Cuarteto Alemán (choir)
3	Trio en si bemol mayor	Ludwig van Beethoven	Teodoro Curant (violin), Luis David (cello), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
4	Il Guarany: grande aria	Carlos Gomes	Rosa Palacios (soprano)
5.1	Mazurka en la menor	Felipe Villanueva	Felipe Villanueva (piano)
5.2	Mazurka en re mayor	Felipe Villanueva	Felipe Villanueva (piano)
Interval			
6	Serenata	Küken	Doble Cuarteto Alemán (choir)
7.1	Romanza	Wilhelmy	Teodoro Curant (violin), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
7.2	Mazurka	Henryk Wienawsky	Teodoro Curant (violin), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
8	Romanza para soprano con acompañamiento de piano y cello	Gustavo E. Campa	Rosa Palacios (soprano), Luis David (cello), Gustavo E. Campa (piano)
9.1	Nostalgia	Ludwig van Beethoven	Luis David (cello), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
9.2	Sueños [Träume (Lieder) Wessendonck]	Richard Wagner	Luis David (cello), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
10	Rondo caprichoso	Felix Mendelssohn	Ricardo Castro (piano)
11.1	O D[¿]ndl'mein	Oberbairische	Doble Cuarteto Alemán (choir)
11.2	Zwa Sternd'lei [sic]	Volkslieder	Doble Cuarteto Alemán (choir)

A.5 Rosa Palacios's Vocal and Instrumental Farewell Concert

Date: 23 November 1885.

Place: Salon of Santa Isabel Street no.2 [French Philharmonic Society], Mexico City.

Source: 'Gran concierto vocal e instrumental Rosa Palacios,' *El diario del hogar*, 19 November 1885, 3.

	Title	Composer (and arraglist)	Performers
1	Himno Austriaco	Joseph Haydn	Felipe Villanueva (violin), Teodoro Curant (violin) Gabriel Unda y Galindo (viola), Luis David (cello)
2	Scena y romanza de la ópera María Tudor	Gustavo E. Campa	Rosa Palacios (soprano)
3	La forza del destino: romanza	Giuseppe Verdi	Carlos Pizzorni (tenor)
4	Aria [Arie, op. 51]	Philipp Scharwenka	Luis David (cello), Gustavo E. Campa (harmonium)
5	Aria de las joyas	Charles Gounod	Rosa Palacios (soprano)
6	Poliuto: gran duo	Gaetano Donizetti	Adela Gini (soprano), Carlos Pizzorni (tenor)
Interval			
7	Ein albumblät (arreglado para violoncello solo, armomium y cuarteto de cuerdas)	Richard Wagner (arr. Gustavo E. Campa)	Luis David (cello solo), Felipe Villanueva (violin), Teodoro Curant (violin), Gabriel Galindo y Unda (Viola), Manuel Peralta (cello), Gustavo E. Campa (harmonium)
8	Maria de Rohan: romanza	Gaetano Donizetti	Vincenzo Quintilli Leoni (tenor)
9	Julieta y Romeo: gran vals	Charles Gounod	Rosa Palacios (soprano)
10	Second Scherzo [Scherzo no. 2 in B flat minor, op. 31]	Frédéric Chopin	Ricardo Castro (piano)
11	Romanza 'Ei non m'ama piu'	Francesco Paolo Tosti	Adela Gini (soprano)
12	Il Guarany: gran duo	Carlos Gomes	Rosa Palacios (soprano), Carlos Pizzorni (tenor)

A.6 Ricardo Castro's Vocal and Instrumental Farewell Concert

Date: 26 December 1885.

Place: National Theatre, Mexico City.

Source: Titania, 'Ecos dominicales,' *La patria*, 24 December 1885, 2.

	Title	Composer (and arreglist)	Performers
1	Gran marcha solemne	Ricardo Castro	Ricardo Castro (conductor), orchestra
2			Orfeón Alemán (choir)
3	El loco, escena dramática para piano solo	Friedrich Kalkbrenner	Ricardo Castro (piano)
4	Pastoral	Gustavo E. Campa	Gustavo E. Campa (conductor), orchestra
5	Mignon: polaca	Ambroise Thomas	Virginia Galván (soprano)
Interval			
6	Le Croisé-Concertstück [sic] para piano con acompañamiento de orquesta	Carl Maria von Weber	Ricardo Castro (piano), Julio Ituarte (conductor), orchestra
7	Dulce recuerdo: romanza sin palabras	Ricardo Castro (arr. Gustavo E. Campa)	Ricardo Castro (conductor), orchestra
8	Ilusión: romanza sin palabras	Ricardo Castro (arr. Gustavo E. Campa)	Ricardo Castro (conductor), orchestra
9	Concierto en mi menor para violín con acompañamiento de orquesta	Félix Mendelssohn	Antonio Figueroa (violin), orchestra
10	Il Guarany: escena y balada	Carlos Gomes	Rosa Palacios (soprano), Julio Ituarte (conductor), orchestra
Interval			
11	Himno a la noche para solista, coro de hombres y orquesta	Gustavo E. Campa	Virginia Galván (soprano), Orfeón Alemán (choir), Gustavo E. Campa (conductor), orchestra
12	Allegro del primer concierto en re menor	Ricardo Castro	Ricardo Castro (piano), Julio Ituarte (conductor), orchestra
13	Lied	Karl Davidoff (arr. Ricardo Castro)	Luis David (cello), orchestra

Appendix A

14	Aida: duo final	Giuseppe Verdi	Virginia Galván (soprano) José Nava (tenor), Julio Ituarte (conductor), orchestra
15	Transcripción del Himno Nacional Mexicano	Jaime Nunó (arr. Ricardo Castro)	Ricardo Castro (piano)
16	¡No me caso! Danza cantada	Ricardo Castro	Rosa Palacios (soprano), Julio Ituate (conductor), orchestra

A.7 Teodoro Curant's Vocal and Instrumental Farewell Concert

Date: 3 February 1886.

Place: Salon of Gante Street no. 5, Mexico City.

Source: Titania, 'Ecos dominicales,' *La patria ilustrada*, 1 February 1886, 2.

	Title	Composer (and arreglist)	Performers
1	Trio para piano, violín y violoncello, op. 52	Anton Rubinstein	Felipe Villanueva (piano), Teodoro Curant (violin), Luis David (cello)
2	Tarantela para piano	Franz Liszt	Clara Hallaran (piano)
3	Aria de <i>Aida</i>	Giuseppe Verdi	Carmen Unda (soprano)
4	Sonata en re menor para violín y piano (grave, fuga, gigue, chaconne, courante y finale)	Rust	Teodoro Curant (violin), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
5	Himno a Víctor Hugo para piano a cuatro manos	Camille Saint-Saëns	Felipe Villanueva (piano), Gustavo E. Campa (piano)
Interval			
6	Cuarteto sobre un fragmento del Oratorio de Noche Buena	Camille Saint-Saëns	Felipe Villanueva (piano), Teodoro Curant (violin), Luis David (cello), Gustavo E. Campa (harmonium)
7	Romanza		Carmen Unda (soprano),
8.1	Nina: romanza	Giovanni Battista Pergolesi	Luis David (cello), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
8.2	Sylvia: vals lento	Léo Delibes	Luis David (cello), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
9	Puritanos: Aria	Vincenzo Bellini	Carmen Unda (soprano)
10.1	Tannhäuser: recitativo y romanza 'La estrella de la noche'	Richard Wagner	Teodoro Curant (violin), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
10.2	Novena sinfonía: scherzo	Franz Schubert	Teodoro Curant (violín), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
11	Bailes húngaros	Johannes Brahms	Felipe Villanueva (piano), Gustavo E. Campa (piano), Teodoro Curant (violin), Luis David (cello)

A.8 Instituto Musical Campa-Hernández Acevedo's Concert

Date: 2 June 1887.

Place: Salon of Santa Isabel Street no.2 [French Philharmonic Society], Mexico City.

Source: 'Gran concierto,' *El siglo diez y nueve*, 2 June 1887, 3.

	Title	Composer (and arreglist)	Performers
1	La Deluge – Prelude	Camille Saint-Saëns	Juan Hernández Acevedo (conductor), orchestra
2	Rêverie [6 Morceaux de salón, op. 22: no. 3. Reverie]	Henri Vieuxtemps	Jacobo García Sagredo (violin), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
3	Wedding Cake, vals caprice	Camille Saint-Saëns	Julio Ituarte (piano), Gustavo Campa (conductor), orchestra
4	Romance	Charles Marie Widor	Juan Hernández Acevedo (flute), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
5	Ballabile	Joseph-Henri Altés	Juan Hernández Acevedo (flute), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
6	<i>Otello</i> , Love duet	Giuseppe Verdi	Carmen Unda (soprano), José Vigil y Robles (tenor), Gustavo Campa (piano)
7	Allegro appassionato for piano in four hands	Gustavo E. Campa	Felipe Villanueva (piano), Fernando Fierro (piano)
Interval			
8	Sonata for violoncello – I. Allegro	Edward Grieg	Luis Felipe (cello), Felipe Villanueva (piano)
9	Concierto for violin, no. 1 – I. Allegro	Niccolò Paganini	Jacobo García Sagredo (violin), Juan Hernández Acevedo (conductor), orchestra
10	Je t'aime	Gustavo E. Campa	José Vigil y Robles (tenor), Gustavo Campa (conductor), orchestra
11	Tarantelle	Camille Saint-Saëns	Juan Hernández Acevedo (flute), Adrián Galarza (clarinette), Felipe Villanueva (piano)

Appendix A

12.1	<i>Otello</i> , Prelude and Willow Song	Giuseppe Verdi	Carmen Unda (soprano), Felipe Villanueva (piano), Gustavo Campa (harmonium)
12.2	<i>Otello</i> , Ave Maria	Giuseppe Verdi	Carmen Unda (soprano), Felipe Villanueva (piano), Gustavo Campa (harmonium)

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